

SELECT DISCOURSES,
ON A
VARIETY
OF
PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY

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*Optimus pastor, qui populariter, pueriliter, simplici-
terque docet.* LUTHER.

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S E R M O N I.

CHRIST'S Victory and Triumph over Principalities and Powers.

COL. ii. 15. *And having spoiled Principalities and Powers, he made a Shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

IN the eighth verse of this chapter, the Apostle states the controversy betwixt himself and some false brethren, who, he heard, had risen in the church at Colosse, and reduces it to three heads; principles of abused philosophy, superstitious and foolish rites, which were merely the inventions of men, and the Mosaical ceremonies, abolished by the death of Christ. He argues against them all, by shewing that Christ is a most compleat Saviour; having no less than the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in him; and consequently such as are in him must be compleat as to every thing necessary for their salvation. In the eleventh verse and downwards, he reasons more particularly against the Mosaical ceremonies, especially circumcision; which it seems was at that time urged as essential to salvation. His argument against it is this: believers have in Christ the thing signified by that ordinance, viz. the circumcision of the heart; which consists in putting off the body of sin flowing from original corruption: And he amplifies this argument by shewing, that we have not only the thing signified, but also the external seal, viz. baptism, which is more expressive of the grace of God than circumcision was.

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He shews further, that they had no need of circumcision in the flesh, because they had all in Christ that was necessary for justification as well as sanctification; God having given them the pardon of their sins, thro' Christ, when they were uncircumcised, being Gentiles. Having mentioned the grace of God in forgiving their trespasses in the next verse, he assigns the ground of this remission in the fourteenth verse; *Blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of way, nailing it to his cross.*

The law, as a covenant of works, and the law as appendaged with ceremonial ordinances, was cancelled by the blood of Christ, taken out of the way, and nailed to his cross. The obligatory bond of the law, unto which the sentence of every man's conscience against himself was a subscription, and unto which the Jews did subscribe in a special manner by their ceremonial observations, was, by the death of Christ, torn in pieces. What madness then must it be to renew that obligation, by observing the ceremonial law?

The text is an amplification of this argument; whereby the apostle shews, that a full and compleat salvation is purchased for us by the death of Christ.

Believers are by that death not only freed from every thing that could militate against them in law, but they are also delivered from the power of such enemies as rule over them by force or violence. *And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

He had said before, that the obligatory bond of the law was nailed to the cross of Christ. He adds now, that in and by the same cross, Satan, with all his auxiliaries,

iliaries, our spiritual enemies, are spoiled and triumphed over. And after one is assured of all this, what does he need more? what has he more to fear? is there any need for men to make an addition to such a compleat Saviour? In the words, (1.) you have an account of a great victory which our Lord Jesus Christ obtained. And here notice, first the parties over whom he was victorious. They are designed by the pompous titles of principalities and powers, that is evil angels, Satan, and the whole apostate tribes. He calls them principalities and powers, because of the power which they have over men in consequence of their sin. They have no natural right and power over men; but when men by sin had cast off their allegiance to God, they were judicially given over to the vassalage and slavery of Satan, the head of the apostate tribe: And the power which he has over them, while they continue his subjects, is great and extensive. Some think also that the title of principalities and powers intimates, that there are different ranks and orders among the bad angels.

(2.) Notice the kind of victory which Christ obtained over these principalities and powers. It was not a destroying them out of hand, as to their simple being: no; Satan and the powers of darkness exist to this very day, and shall exist for ever. The victory then consisted in spoiling these enemies of God and men. Christ spoiled Satan of all his power, armour, and riches. He was dispossessed of the spoil which he took up, and proudly boasted of, when Adam fell. The original word, here rendered spoiled, properly signifies to strip or make naked, and carries a manifest allusion to the custom of conquerors, who

used to strip the conquered of their armour, and hang it upon a pillar, which they frequently erected in the very place where the victory was won. Thus Christ having obtained the victory over Satan, stript him of all his weapons, and hung them for a trophy upon his cross: so that when the Jews fixed the cross of Christ in the ground, to make it stand erect, they raised a pillar, though they wist it not, on which Satan's whole armour was hung up and exposed to public view.

(3.) In the words ye have Christ's triumph over the conquered. *He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them*, or triumphed them, as it is in the original; that is to say, led them in triumph. Still there is a manifest allusion to the custom of conquerors in their triumphs. The heads or chief men of the conquered party, were taken and bound in chains by two and two, or more; and in this disgraceful manner they went sometimes before, and sometimes behind the triumphant chariot of the conqueror: and this tragical scene was always beheld by a vast crowd of people, for the honour of the victors, and for the shame of the captives.

Thus Christ having conquered Satan, with all the powers of darkness, led him in triumph, and exposed him before God and all the holy angels, as a conquered and captived enemy. But of this again.

In the last place, observe, when and where all this was done. Why, it was at the death and upon the cross of Christ. Even when and where Satan thought to have had the day, by putting to death the innocent Jesus, was he and all his powers conquered and triumphed over, by the Lord of life, to their eternal
shame

shame and mortification. The words rendered *in it*, refer the victory and triumph to the cross, whereof the apostle had been speaking in the preceeding verse.

DOCTRINE. Christ having by his death upon the cross obtained the victory over Satan, with all the powers of darkness, led them in open triumph.

In discoursing on this subject, I shall, first, speak of the victory which Christ obtained over Satan; secondly, of the triumph; and then make some improvement of what is said.

In speaking of the victory which Christ obtained over Satan, I shall, first, Shew the ground of the quarrel betwixt them. Secondly, How Christ obtained the victory over him by his death upon the cross. Thirdly, I shall name some properties of this victory.

I return to the first thing proposed, viz. To shew the ground of the quarrel betwixt Christ and Satan: for, as victory supposes a war going before, so a war must be founded upon some quarrel, upon some offence given or received, either real or imaginary.

The ground of the quarrel, then, was twofold. *First*, Satan, with his angels, left their first habitation and fell, Jude 6 ver. Their being said to have left it, seems to intimate their dissatisfaction with it. They were not pleased with their condition, though it was the same with those angels who stood, therefore they left it, and set up for themselves, in opposition to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The apostle Peter says, they sinned. Now consider what a terrible thing it was to rub an affront upon God in his highest court; to sin against him even in heaven, the place where he dwells, and you will soon and easily

fly perceive a sufficient foundation for a quarrel against them; even a quarrel to be eternally pursued. They were the first inventors and founders of that evil thing called sin, which is the very opposite of God and all good. And if it be true which is alleged by some, that the point of their first sin was directed against the Son of God, as he was to be manifested in man's nature, then certainly it became Christ, in a special manner, to avenge the quarrel.

Secondly, Satan, the head of the apostate spirits, betrayed our first parents into sin, by which the covenant between God and man was broken, and the whole world brought in guilty before God, Gen. iii. 4, 5. He misrepresented God unto man, and he continues to do so still. He also misrepresents man unto God; for as is his name, so is his nature and practice. He is the devil, the calumniator, the malignant, and the very fire-brand of the whole creation of God. He brought two things into the world, which were solely his own, for they are essentially opposite to the nature and works of God: these were sin and death. He brought sin, that ugly monster into the very garden where God had placed the man; and from thence he sent it out into the wide world, where it has remained for more than five thousand years; and to this very day God is not able to look upon it. Then he introduced death into the world: that is not of God's making neither. Death is of a heterogeneous nature. Hence the apostle, Rom. v. 12. tells us, that it entered by sin: it entered in at the same crevice with sin, and by the same hand, viz. Satan. And now we may easily imagine, what joy and satisfaction the malignant spirit, with his tribe, would have at the thought

thought of having ushered sin and death into God's dominion. When God looked at first upon his own works, he was well pleased, because they were all very good: so, when Satan looked upon sin and death, the works which he had made, he was, to be sure, also well pleased. He would boast and triumph like a Nebuchadnezzar, saying, this I have done for the honour of my majesty, and for the support of my kingdom, in opposition to God.

Here then you will easily perceive a broad foundation for a second quarrel, a quarrel of a public nature, for the first was personal; but this was public, inasmuch as the sons of men were concerned in it; and therefore Christ avenged it in our nature, and in our name, as our public head and representative. While the proud apostate was triumphing, while he was defying the honour and armies of the living God, one combatant, a match and more for him, appears upon the field, and proclaims against him and his seed, Gen. iii. 15. As this war was soon proclaimed, so it was instantly and constantly carried on: so that among the first sons which Adam had, there was a parting of the seeds; God got Abel, Satan got Cain, and so it went on to father and son on both sides, through the several periods of the church, till at length God incarnate came upon the field, and in his own person fought Satan, and obtained a compleat victory over him, while himself seemed to be overcome. And this leads me to the second thing proposed, which was to shew how Christ obtained the victory over Satan by his death upon the cross.

First, There was a divine appointment in the death of Christ, to spoil Satan with all his auxiliaries,
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Heb. ii. 14. 1 John iii. 8. It was the great design of his enemies to get him put to death, and especially the death of the cross: for then, to be sure, they thought they would have done with him, he would trouble them no more; and his going out of the world in such a disgraceful manner, would make his name hateful to mankind. And no doubt Satan promised himself great things, with respect to the promoting and securing the interests of his kingdom, if he could get Christ put to the death of the cross. To believe in one who was crucified, was a stumbling block to the Jews; and to look for salvation from a crucified man, appeared a most ridiculous fancy to the Gentiles. But behold with wonder the deeps and manifold plies of the wisdom of God, whose ways are not as man's ways! By this determination and appointment, the dead man, nay, the crucified man, pulls down Satan's whole fabrick about his ears. The shameful despised cross, having the wisdom and power of God in it, is made a pillar to hang up Satan's armour on; a triumphal chariot, behind which he, with all his auxiliaries, must be dragged in chains: the father and friends of the crucified Jesus, looking on all the while, rejoicing. Thus you see the force of a divine appointment: it can break through and baffle the wisdom of men and devils: it can strengthen the spoiled against the strong: it can bring glory out of shame, life out of death, and victory out of conquest.

Secondly, Christ, by his death upon cross, took away sin, and delivered the elect from death, whereof Satan had the power: and hereby he was conquered and his spoil taken from him. He is the Lamb of God,

God, who took away the sin of the world. From whence does Satan get the pompous title of God of this world? Why, he derives it from sin and death, upon which his kingdom was erected, and by which it stands. If then the two pillars be removed by a mighty one, the whole superstructure falls to the ground. His kingdom is departed from him. Now as to the first of these pillars, namely, sin, Christ brake it down, inasmuch as by his death upon the cross he fully satisfied the demands of the broken law, which was the strength of that pillar: *for the strength of sin is the law.* And as for the other pillar, viz. death, it must necessarily fall upon the removal of the former, which is the strength and sting of it. Moreover, Christ, by his own death, is said to have swallowed it up in victory; and he will pursue that victory, till there shall not be such a thing as death in all his dominions. Now, if by the merit and power of Christ's death, the elect world be delivered from sin in its guilt, dominion, and being, and from death in its sting, are they not delivered from Satan? where is his authority over them? is not his sceptre taken away? and is he not a conquered enemy?

Thirdly, Satan was spoiled by the death of Christ, through the imminent hand which he had all along in bringing about this death. For understanding what I mean, you will observe, that Satan, by presuming to tempt Christ, and by his hatching and contriving the death of Christ, forfeited all his authority and power over men; and that being forfeited, he is a spoiled enemy.

Satan's power over men was given him by way of commission from God, for the punishment of sin. And

as every commission has its limitations, which being broken through, the commission is forfeited, so had this commission of Satan. It was confined to sinners; and therefore if he meddled with one who was not a sinner, he exceeded the bounds of his commission, and so it became forfeit. Now, the devil not only set upon a man who was not a sinner, but upon the Son of God himself. He attacked him in the wilderness, and being repulsed, had the impudence to renew his temptation: and it would seem he tempted him frequently. He stirred up the people against him. He entered into the heart of Judas, one of his disciples, by whom he was betrayed. And at the death of Christ, the powers of darkness, by the divine permission, set upon him, and did their utmost, but were foiled. The holy and just God, by this method, took the wise in their own craftiness. He suffered Satan to fall into the blunder of meddling with Christ, and carrying on his death, that he might forfeit his power over men, and so be spoiled of all, by that very thing which he thought would be an absolute security for all.

Fourthly, The death of Christ was the completing part of the work of redemption; and so was, as it were, the fatal stroke to Satan. When a man receives one blow after another, till he fall, the last blow is said to kill him. So it was here. Christ gave Satan many blows and bruises in his life; but these which he gave him at the last were the fatal ones. Many a blow he gave him in the midst of his boasting over fallen man. That was one, the promise of the seed of the woman to bruise his head. When he proclaimed war against him at his incarnation

tion he gave him another ; and many more in the days his flesh : yet for all these he would not be quiet, but came often unto him. Therefore when he came to the place where he was to die, he took that very cross which Satan had prepared for him, and with its mighty force dashed out his brains, bruised him and trod him like mortar ; while Satan, with all his power, could not break one bone of him. All this Christ did in the name of his people, as their head and representative.

I proceed now to mention some properties of this victory which Christ obtained. And,

First, It was a very dear-bought victory. Victories are not gained without wounds and blood on both sides. So it was here. Precious blood, even the blood of God was shed in the field of battle, and yet not one drop of it was lost : nay, the conqueror himself died, and yet he obtained the victory. The prince of life was killed, that principalities and powers might be spoiled. Surely the spoils which he distributes among believers, whom he allowed to remain at home, should be highly valued, since they were purchased at no less expence than the life and blood of God.

Secondly, It was a righteous victory. *If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully.* Christ's conquest was not an unjust one, like many of the conquests gained by the heroes and potentates of the world. Alexander, and the Cæsars of old, conquered places, cities and kingdoms, taking the spoil to themselves, while they had no just right to it, but only wanted to aggrandize themselves, and purchase a fame for heroic achievements, that might

last in the world while they themselves were gone; but the Captain of our salvation made no unjust conquest over Satan and the powers of darkness, for they detained his lawful subjects in captivity: was it not righteous then to deliver them?

Lastly, It was a most glorious victory. Never was there a victory attended with so great glory to the conqueror, and with so great shame to the conquered. Had Satan, with his auxiliaries, been spoiled by holy angels, he might have alleged he met with his match: or had he been spoiled by a meer act of omnipotence, he might have boasted that he had put God to his utmost: but to be conquered by the human nature, at which he had a particular spite, and which was lower than his own, to fall by a man, by a dying man, a crucified man, a dead man! what everlasting shame and mortification was this! Moreover, as Satan prevailed over men by an act of subtilty, so Christ prevailed against him, not by a meer act of power, but by righteousness and wisdom; for had he been to have prevailed by power, there was no occasion to assume the human nature.

I come now to speak to Christ's triumph upon this victory. The question is, whether the expression in the text is merely figurative, or if there was a real triumph over the principalities and powers of darkness, by exposing them in a most public manner before God, before all the holy angels, and perhaps before the spirits of just men made perfect too, as conquered enemies. I go in with the last, for the following reasons:

First, The original words in the text, by which the triumph is exprest, intimate the reality of it. The word

word rendered to make a *shew*, is the same with that in Matth. i. 19. which is rendered to make a public example. Moreover, in Num. xxv. 4. when Moses was commanded to take the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word for hanging them up, by the same word with that in our text. Again, the word rendered *openly*, signifies in the sight of others, and in the most public manner.

Secondly, The devil and his angels, being intelligent creatures, were capable of being really exposed and put openly to shame, when defeated in their designs. And therefore, to object that the allusion in our text must be explained, as that in the preceeding verse with respect to the law, is not solid: for sin and the law are not persons, but things, and so not capable of being put to shame; but it is evidently otherwise in this case.

And to add no more: The nature and end of a triumph in war, unto which there is a manifest allusion here, leads to this sense. A triumph was always celebrated openly before a multitude; nay, often there were some who shouted all the way, victory, victory; and all this for the honour of the victor, and the shame of the captives: so that if a triumph was carried on privately, it was contrary to its nature, and lost the end of its institution.

I pass on to the application.

Is it so, that Jesus Christ, having by his death on the cross *spoiled principalities and powers, made a shew of them openly?* Then, in the *first* place, all who fight under Satan, are conquered with him. When a king or general falls in the field of battle, all his

his supporters fall with him, and are said to be conquered. So Christ having spoiled Satan upon the cross, did at that very instant reach a deadly blow to every one of his supporters. Hence, the law's obligatory bond upon you, believers, was nailed to the cross. The old man of sin was crucified with him. The world was conquered. Death was swallowed up in victory. And, in a word, every thing that could militate for Satan against the saints, was removed out of the way.

Secondly, Christians have no ground to be ashamed of the cross of Christ; but, on the contrary, to boast and glory in it. The God of glory having spoiled Satan upon the cross, and made it a chariot of triumph after the victory, has removed the reproach of it, and made it truly honourable. Therefore, believers, while the carnal noisy world are boasting loudly, some in their wisdom, some in their strength, others in their wealth, let your boasting be all the day-long in the cross of Christ. Faith's views of the conqueror, faith's views of the cross as the field of battle, and the triumphant chariot, will furnish you with the most noble grounds of boasting. Besides, the dignity and honour of Christ's cross should make you boast in your own; for by it Christ puts honour upon you before the world, angels, and men. Hereby he conforms you to himself: and is it not honour to be conformed to him? As he conquered Satan, notwithstanding his cross, nay, by his cross, so he will lead you forth into the field of battle, compassed about with infirmities, pained and borne down with the weight of the cross, and yet ye shall return triumphant, even as he did.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, By this victory and this triumph, Christ's name is rendered famous for ever. His name, says David, *shall last as the sun*. Time has buried the remembrance of persons and events, and especially victories, which once a day made a mighty noise in the world, and that too in spite of every mean used to perpetuate the remembrance of them. The marble pillars, the statues and monuments, by which the potentates of the world hoped to eternize their memory, are gone to ruins, as well as their founders. But behold, here is a conqueror and a conquest, the remembrance of both which has been kept up in the world for many hundreds of years, and will be kept up when time shall be no more: nay, it will not end with time, but continue through eternity. To preserve the memory of this victory, the supper is instituted. If therefore those who are strangers to our commonwealth and covenant of promise, ask us what we mean by covering a sacramental table, and sitting down at it; the answer is at hand; it is to perpetuate the famous name of the man Jesus, the Son of God, who, more than seventeen hundred years ago, being nailed hands and feet upon a cross, baffled all the powers of hell.

Fourthly, No wonder that Satan and wicked men are enemies to the cross. The spirits of the conquered party cannot miss to be ruffled and filled with spite against the conqueror. How must the revengeful and proud spirit of Satan be galled and tortured at the thoughts of his being foiled by the cross of Christ, which he reckoned could secure all! how great must the fretting and anguish of his spirit be! shall we wonder then, that he and his have done, and are still doing

doing to this day what they can, to ruin the reputation of the cross?

Fifthly, Believers, here is great encouragement for you in opposing Satan, and all your spiritual enemies. They are conquered already by the Captain of your salvation. They have all got such a deadly bruise by the cross, that they shall not be able to overcome you. Christ, indeed, could have bruised them so, that they should not have been able to make the least motion against you; but for the glory of his grace, and for the greater mortification of the prince of darkness, he will have him overthrown and trodden upon by the weakest child in all his family. Resist him then, believers, and all his accomplices, as knowing, that every degree of resistance is a degree of conquest over him. And mind always to exercise faith in the death of Christ, as the most effectual mean of opposing him. Let faith present the cross of Christ to him, and he will fly from you ashamed.

Lastly, Enemies of Christ, subject yourselves to him. Join this glorious conqueror. Why do ye run against the thick bosses of the buckler of the Almighty? why do ye harden yourselves against him? do ye imagine ye can do so, and prosper? Nay, if ye will not bow before him, ye shall be broken on the wheel of divine vengeance: therefore desert the enemy's camp this day, and give your hearty consent to have your names registered in Christ's muster-roll: throw away the weapons of rebellion, and take unto you the whole armour of God, so shall ye at length be conquerors over sin, Satan, death, and hell.

S E R M O N II.

The Nature of the Sin of MOSES, in speaking unadvisedly with his Lips.

NUMB. XX. 10. *And MOSES and AARON gathered the Congregation together before the Rock; and he said unto them, Hear now, ye Rebels; must we fetch you Water out of this Rock?*

WHEN we hear that Moses, being provoked by the people, spake unadvisedly with his lips, and was therefore not allowed to carry the people unto the promised land, it is natural for us to desire to know what words the good man uttered in his haste, which were attended with such fatal consequences. And, lest we should imagine these words to be worse than they really were, they stand upon record here in the text; *Hear now, ye rebels, &c.*

The Israelites were now in the fortieth year of their wanderings in the wilderness, and being in want of water, they fall a murmuring and fretting most bitterly against Moses and Aaron, as was usual upon the occurrence of new difficulties, as you see from verse second to verse sixth.

They murmured for water once before, even at Rephidim, in the beginning of their march, where they were miraculously supplied; and being trysted with the like difficulty at the latter end of it, their behaviour was as obstinate as ever.

Moses and Aaron do not upbraid them here, nor stand up to vindicate themselves from their contumelious aspersions; but prostrate themselves before the Lord, as they used to do in like cases. This application being made, the Lord directs Moses what he should do and say in the matter. He must take the rod in his hand, and speak to the rock before their eyes, and then it would give water. In the text it is declared what obedience Moses gave to this direction. And, *First*, Ye hear what he did. Having taken the rod in his hand, he gathered the congregation before the rock. This was very well so far. But in the next place ye learn what he spake: *Hear now, ye rebels*. These are the words which the Psalmist says he spoke unadvisedly with his lips.

My design at present is to shew, what was sinful and provoking to God, in what Moses said and did. And, in the next place, lay before you some things, which we may learn from the passage, for our use.

First, There was disobedience to the divine command; a going contrary to the direction he had received from the Lord. He was commanded to take the rod in his hand, and speak to the rock before the eyes of the people; and so God would have shewn the people, that the very rocks were more obedient to his voice than they. But Moses, instead of speaking to the rock, in obedience to God, speaks to the people, and that in a passion, and with the rod smites the rock no less than twice. Moses perhaps thought it would do better to smite the rock, because long before this he smote the rock at Rephidim, and water came forth. But at that time he had express orders from God to smite the rock, and that with his rod;

rod; but now he was ordered to speak to it. Since then there was here a plain breach of an express command, delivered to him by the Lord in so many words, we are not to wonder that the Lord shewed his indignation against it. There is no command little which has the divine sanction annexed to it; and therefore the question is not, what a thing is in itself, but what is the will of God. It is the last of these which is to be the rule of our actions. Moreover, since there was to be a miracle in the case, the directions of the God who worketh wonders ought to have been more punctually observed.

Secondly, There was immoderate heat and passion in the conduct of Moses. This appeared eminently both in what he did and said. It appeared in what he did, for he smote the rock no less than twice. Perhaps when he smote it the first time, there came forth only some drops of water, so that he smote it in a passion the second time, and then the water gushed out. It appeared also in what he said: *Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock.* There is passion almost in every word. He calls them rebels, and so they were. He did not miscall them: and therefore, it was not so much the words themselves, as the heat of his spirit in uttering them, that provoked the Lord. He lays a charge full as heavy against them afterwards, which no doubt the Lord approved of; ye have it, Deut. ix. 24. *You have been rebellious against the Lord since the day that I knew you.* But he spake these words with great composure, and with deep concern upon his spirit; whereas, the words of the text were a fally of passion. After calling them rebels, he adds, *must we fetch you*
C 2 water

water out of this rock. As if he had said, are we brought to this again by your groundless murmurings! must we do such a work as this for your sakes, who deserve no good, but all evil. Thus he spake unadvisedly with his lips, as the Psalmist terms it, Psal. cvi. 33. What is spoken in simplicity and weakness, is sometimes said to be spoken unadvisedly. But that the Psalmist, by this expression, did not mean simplicity and weakness, but heat and passion, is plain from what he assigns as the cause of his unadvised speaking; and that is angering him and provoking his spirit. They vexed him for a long series of years; and especially when any thing that was adverse happened them, they never failed to wreck themselves upon him, as if he had been the procuring cause of all. And this they did in a most intolerable manner at this time: so that the spirit of Moses, meek as he was, was quite ruffled and embittered; and in his haste he blabs out the words of my text. He had not premeditated or prepared them as a reproof to the people from the Lord; neither had he them from the Spirit of the Lord; but the heat of his own spirit suggested them to him, and he behaved to have them out. At the same time I am ready to think, there were some special circumstances which contributed to fret his spirit more than ordinary against the people at this time; particularly the death of Miriam, upon which their murmuring immediately ensued. Miriam was a prophetess: she had been one of their leaders, and had done them good service. One would therefore have thought, that a just sense of her death, and the loss they had thereby sustained, would have made them more humble,

ble, and kept them from murmuring against God, and such of their leaders as were still alive. Put then the grief of Moses for Miriam's death, and the shamefully bad behaviour of the people under this dispensation together, and you will easily perceive how his mind would be the more easily ruffled.

Thus, then, Moses sinned, in that he spake to the people in the heat and bitterness of his spirit. And as this was unbecoming a man of his temper, and of his former way of managing, so it happened in a very bad time. At that time he came, ye know, with a commission from God to work a miracle, and so was to act in God's place to that people; and therefore, such a passionate frame of spirit was very dishonouring to God, who had spoken to him but a very little before. To come from the presence of God, yea, from a conference with God, in such a heat of passion, could not miss of being very offensive to him. I have insisted the more upon the passion in which Moses uttered the words, because the Spirit of God, by the mouth of the Psalmist, seems to place the sin here.

In the *third* place, There was unbelief in what Moses did. This is clear from God's charge and sentence against him and Aaron in the twelfth verse. *Because, says God, ye believed me not.* Some think that Moses hardly believed that God would bring water out of the rock to them, (not because he thought the Lord could not do it, for this he had done before); but he thought the people, by their repeated rebellions, had rendered themselves altogether incapable of receiving so great a favour. It is thought likewise, that he doubted somewhat of the promise of entering into the land, although that was the fortieth

tieth year of their wandering; for the water they got out of the rock at Rephidim was to supply them during their remaining in the wilderness; therefore, if they smote a new rock, he might be afraid they would have to tarry as long again in the wilderness. But of these things we cannot speak certainly. Yet there was unbelief, as well as disobedience, in his smiting the rock, and that twice, when he was commanded only to speak to it.

Fourthly, All this was done publicly in presence of the congregation; and so it was the more dishonouring to God. When the Lord spake to Moses, he commanded him to gather the congregation together, that they might see his power and mercy, and be ashamed out of their unbelief and murmuring: and if Moses had stood to his orders in speaking to the rock, and not smiting it, who knows what effect it might have had upon the people; at least, it would still have been a new and more eminent instance of divine power; for they had seen, or at least heard of water coming out of the rock, by smiting it, many years before: but for a rock to send forth water by speaking to it, is still more wonderful than to do it by smiting it. Besides, the congregation saw Moses in a terrible passion when he uttered these words, and was to work for them in God's name. His very countenance, and the tone in which he uttered his words, would discover his passion to them; and thus God was not sanctified and honoured, but dishonoured before the eyes of the Israelites, and that by his prime minister, Moses, as he complains, verse 12.

And now in the *second* place, Let us see what we may learn from this tragical story. And *first*, See here

here what a holy and jealous God it is with whom we have to do. He narrowly marks the steps of his own children, Amos iii. 2. Others may break over the hedge, and go unpunished all their life time, while the children of the family are severely punished for a look over it. They may go mourning in the bitterness of their souls all their life time, for one wrong step, while others, who never go one right step, dwell at ease. Some may be ready to think this step of the good man Moses, was very small, and very severely punished; but let us not charge God foolishly; for all his ways are judgment. He sees not as man sees, neither does he judge after the manner of men. His dispensations, and the reasons of them, are known to himself; and *who may say unto him what doest thou.*

Secondly, We may learn here, that the Lord's children need not think it strange, if they get abundance of exercise for that gift or grace wherein they most excel. The meekness of Moses must be exercised with the unbelief, murmuring and rebellion of the Israelites, for the space of forty years. The patience of Job must be tried with a variety of afflictions, both personal and domestic, and that for a long time. The master gives no talents to hide in a napkin and ly by us; nay, the charge is to *occupy and to improve till he come.* And thus God is glorified, and the saints themselves profited. I say God is glorified; for as the meekness of Moses, and the patience of Job, were the gifts of God, so the praise of the great things done by them is due to God, who endowed them with these graces, and not to the men who were endowed. Hereby also the saints themselves are profited; for the

the more that grace is exercised, it is the fitter for exercise. The more it is tryed, it can the better abide the trial; so that they who possess it, grow in it more and more, till at length it is perfected in glory. If therefore God has given you a particular talent, lay it out chearfully for his use. Let every grace, but especially that wherein ye excel, have its perfect work in you, else the strength and excellency of it will not appear. Your meekness and patience will shine most conspicuously, when ye encounter with provocation and pain.

Thirdly, Let us not be surpris'd to see or hear of the saints failing remarkably, even in the exercise of that grace wherein they most excel. The meek man, Moses, falls into a violent passion, and cries, *Hear ye rebels*. Patient Job, during the continuance of his trials, takes fits of impatience, and speaks in the bitterness of his spirit. Grace here is but in its state of imperfection; and therefore, however much we may excel in one particular grace, we are still in hazard of being betrayed by its opposite lust: and the Lord's children, being apt to turn secure upon the success they get in that grace wherein they excel, are, sometimes, for their correction, suffered to fall before the enemy.

Fourthly, Learn never to think yourselves secure from falling, till ye be at the end of your race. Moses stumbled in the fortieth year of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, when they were shortly to enter into the promised land. And would ye not have thought there was no great fear, but the man who had borne their murmurings thirty nine years, would wrestle out the fortieth and last year with them. By
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this time we would think the bitterness of death was past. Ay, but it was not so. Moses failed in his meekness when his greatest provocations were drawing to a close. Moreover, he was at this time not only an old man, but an old Christian; and had gathered a vast stock of experiences. He was now confirmed and built up strongly *in his most holy faith*; and yet he fell into the snare. Here, then, is a warning to all of us, but especially to you, the old and experienced disciples of Christ. My brethren, your long standing in the world has given you opportunity to observe several dispensations of providence, both towards yourselves and others. Perhaps ye have seen some false professors discovered. Ye have seen them split upon a rock, and make shipwreck of their pretended faith. Ye have likewise seen some of the Lord's children left for a while to themselves, and suffered to dishonour him before the world; and amidst all these reelings and shakings, ye have been helped, in some measure, to walk with him, and retain your integrity even to this period of your life. Well, thus far we desire to rejoice with you, and to bless the Lord on your account: but at the same time, we warn you to be sober and vigilant. The enemy lyes in wait at the latter end of your way, as well as at the beginning and middle of it; and if ye fall towards the latter end of your journey, the little of it then remaining will be the more tedious: *Therefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* Never think your foot secure, till once it be set upon the holy ground that lyes on the other side of Jordan.

Fifthly, See here the need we have to guard con-

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stantly against our unruly passions, and to put a bridle upon our lips, lest we dishonour God, offend the generation of the righteous, and break our own peace. *We know not what manner of spirits we are of*; but an holy and jealous God knows them, and will observe them narrowly: therefore men must not think, that their being in a passion, is a just excuse for the rash and unadvised words they utter at such a time; for here the cause is sinful as well as the effect. We must *be angry and sin not*. Anger is allowable, but passion is sinful. And however little some people may think of passion, or of sinful words uttered in passion, yet, methinks, this tragical story, which the Holy Ghost thought fit to record and hand down to us concerning Moses, should make us tremble, and commit our spirits to the care of God with the greatest earnestness. Consider this, ye who curse and swear; who open your mouth like hell in your passion: what do ye deserve at the hand of God, when his own servant was so punished for uttering words which had none of those things in them. Let the children of God, under the rod, take heed what they say in their fits of impatience. *Charge not God foolishly*; nor let your passion vent itself upon second causes. Whatever ye bear at God's hand, sure I am he bears a great deal more at yours: and therefore, a holy silence and submission to sovereignty is your duty.

Sixthly, Here is confirmed what the Psalmist observes; that though God pardon the iniquity of his servants, yet he will take vengeance on their inventions, Psal. xcix. 8. The sin of Moses, in speaking unadvisedly with his lips, and all his other sins, were, without all peradventure, freely forgiven him for Christ's

Christ's sake. He died at the mouth of the Lord. The Lord sucked out his soul, accounting it precious; and as for his body, it got a most honourable interment, for the Lord himself buried it, Deut. xxxiv. 6. Well, but for all this the Lord took vengeance upon his inventions. He would not suffer him to perfect the work, although his heart was greatly set upon it. He has the mortification to carry the people through the worst of their way, near forty years, and then to give up his charge to Joshua his servant, that he and they may enter in and possess the pleasant land. Think it not strange, then, if God pardon your sin, and yet make you go halting and mourning in the bitterness of your soul to your graves. Ye have escaped the punishment that is abiding some prosperous unpardoned sinners: Why then should ye repine under the chastisement of the saints?

Seventhly, If God thus punishes his children for falling into the snare, how shall ye escape who lay the snare for them? Observe the doom of the diggers of the pit, Psal. vii. 15, 16. What punishment was due to the murmurers who thus provoked the meek spirit of Moses. O then take care of laying snares for others, especially for the people of God. I know some are very much employed this way, and pride themselves in it. They lay the snare, and if they get a serious person caught in it, they laugh and triumph over him and his religion. But let such persons know, that as in this they act the devil's part, so, if they repent not, they shall through all eternity be sharers with him in his punishment.

In the *last* place, we may here observe the great ingenuity of the penmen of the holy scripture. Moses

wrote this book, wherein his own fault stands recorded. The Holy Ghost moved him to it, and he did not resist the motion. Other writers would either have concealed or extenuated their faults: But the good man here is satisfied, that, for the honour of God, and for a warning to the righteous, his shame be put on record, and published and transmitted to all generations. And he not only speaks of it here, but afterwards no less than twice, Deut. i. 37. and again, iii. 25, 26. And there it is observable, with how great meekness and calmness of temper he rehearses the tragical story, neither reflecting upon God nor the people, though they had been the occasion of his being kept from going over Jordan.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N III.

The true CHRISTIAN'S Burden, and
Exercise under it.

ROM. vii. 24. *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

THESE words present us with a good man in great distress; wounded in spirit; *and a wounded spirit who can bear?* When a Christian sees his foul face, heart and hands, in the glass of the holy law, he is filled with shame and sorrow; and readily gives vent to his grief in the Apostle's words, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* You and I may be ready to think, that if we had as much grace, as much communion with God, and knowledge of his secrets as Paul had, when he uttered this doleful complaint, we would reckon ourselves the happiest men in the world, and be always praising the Lord. But none of God's children have any useless talents. Strong grace is commonly yoked with strong corruption. This great man, notwithstanding his high attainments, is in a deep plunge; and out of the depths he cries unto the Lord, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

In the words (1.) He complains of his wretchedness, and bewails it from a deep sense and feeling of it; *O wretched man that I am!* Strange! what ails the

the man? why does he thus groan? what makes the great Christian, the great Apostle and preacher of Jesus Christ, the special favourite of heaven, Paul, to call himself a wretched man? has he lost his health? has he lost his friends? is he imprisoned? is he under reproach and persecution? No: all these things he could have borne; yea, in all these things he could have rejoiced, and even gloried, that *the power of Christ might rest upon him*, 2 Cor. xii. 9. But he was in hot conflict with that great enemy of God, and of all good men, called sin. He was entered the lists with the old man, and the battle was like to go fore against him; therefore he cries out, *O wretched man that I am!* The word here rendered *wretched* or *miserable*, does not denote one in a cursed state, as being out of the favour of God. The Apostle was by this time a regenerated man, and speaks of himself as such. Neither is his calling himself a wretched man, to be understood as the effect of a passionate and fretful spirit. Job, though a good man, has several expressions about the misery of his condition, that were the fruit of his impatient fits: but there is no such thing as sinful passion or bitterness in this expression, or in this text, which may be called the groan of a godly man; and therefore, this expression signifies, one tired and wearied with continual conflicts and strivings against sin. The Apostle here is like a weak man, wrestling under a heavy burden; and at length, being like to faint under the pressure, cries out, *Oh wearied, Oh wretched creature that I am, who shall deliver me, who shall rid me of this heavy burden that is like to crush me! or like a champion, who having striven a long time, is at last like to be overcome*

come of his adversary, unless he be helped; and so he cries, Oh, how am I tired and wearied! who shall deliver me, or obtain the victory for me!

(2.) He shews his earnest desire of deliverance; *who shall deliver?* And this the Apostle speaks not as being ignorant of him who should deliver him, nor yet as doubting nor despairing of deliverance; but hereby he signifies his earnest desire of it. It is, as it were, the voice of one panting and breathing to be delivered; and withal, he hints his utter inability to deliver himself.

(3.) He shews what it is he would be delivered from, viz. *the body of this death*. Some understand the words, as if the Apostle had desired to be delivered from his conflicts with sin by his bodily death. But I choose rather to understand them of the mass and lump of sin, that in part abides in believers while they are in this life. The body of this death, or this body of death; is the fleshly unrenewed part in believers. It is the old man, or the remains of sin in them. Now, this remainder of sin in believers, is called a body, and a body of death. It is called a body, (1.) To shew the reality of it. Sin, considered either absolutely, or as it remains in believers, is not a chimera or meer imagination of men's brains. That there is such an abominable thing as sin, God knows, the saints know, the devil knows, and wicked men, who now deride it, shall know at last to their cost. It is not a slight superficial thing; but it is a body of considerable magnitude. Meantime, ye are not to look upon it as if it were a bodily substance, or a creature of God; neither are ye to look upon it as a meer privation of good; but as that which has likewise somewhat positively

sively evil in it. (2.) It is called a body, for it has all the dimensions of a body. *It is high grown up unto the heavens*, as Ezra observes, chap. ix. 6. Oh the malignant nature of sin, that dares approach so near the dwelling place of the Most High; yea, and to come within it, as it did when it seized upon the angels that fell. It is deep, for it goes down to hell. It cast the angels down from the highest heavens to the lowest hell. It is long and broad, for it goes to the end of the world, and the whole world over. (3.) It is called a body, because it hath many members, Col. iii. 5. *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, &c.* The corrupt heart has divers lusts and pleasures. The seed of every evil thing lurks in it, and is ready to spring up upon every temptation.

But then it is called a body of death, (1.) Because it is noisome and filthy. A holy God cannot endure it: *He cannot look on it but with abhorrence*, Hab. i. 13. Holy angels and holy men cannot bear it. Nothing is so vile, loathsome and nauseous to them, as sin. It is like a vile rotten carcass, that has polluted the air of this world, so that all die who breathe in it. (2.) Because it is a deadly thing. As the sons of the Prophets said to the man of God, *There is death in the pot*, so may we say of sin, there is death in it. Death is said to have *entered by sin*, Rom. v. 12. And sin, when it is finished, is said to *bring forth death*; this latter being, as it were, the child of the former. (3.) It tends and binds over to death, Rom. vi. 23. It is the cause of temporal death, or the dissolution of the frame of our nature: For although the original constitution of human nature was

was such, as that man was not absolutely immortal, yet it is not probable, that he should actually have died without the intervention of sin, as the meritorious cause thereof. And then it tends to eternal death. The regenerate, indeed, are not actually liable unto it, though there be remains of sin in them; but they deserve it: for sin is sin in whomsoever it is; and as such it deserves death. Hence the Apostle, when asserting the privileges of believers, says not, that there is nothing condemnable in them, but that *there is no condemnation to them*, Rom. viii. 1.

DOCTRINE. The regenerate groan under remaining corruption in them, and earnestly desire a complete deliverance from it.

In discoursing on this subject, I would, *First*, Make some observations from the text and context. *2dly*, Shew what is implied in the regenerate man's groaning under the remains of sin in him. *3dly*, Consider the reasons of the doctrine. *Lastly*, Make improvement of the subject.

In the *First* place, I am to make some observations from the text and context.

1. I observe, that here we have the combat betwixt the flesh and the spirit, exemplified in the person of the chief Apostle of Jesus Christ. Some, I know, doubt whether Paul here speaks of himself as a regenerate man; but I think there are several things in the chapter, which seem to put the matter out of doubt. Thus, verse 9. *For I was alive without the law once*, &c. These words seem to give an account of the preparatives to his conversion, viz. his conviction and humiliation; see also ver. 17, 18, 22. None of these things can be said of an unregenerate man.

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Now, it is of great advantage to you who believe, that, in your strugglings with remaining corruption, you have the example of such an eminent saint as Paul set before you. Thus ye know that your case is far from being singular; but that it has been the case of saints of the first magnitude.

2. I observe, that Paul makes a distinction here that is peculiar to a regenerate man. He distinguishes betwixt Paul in himself, and Paul in Christ Jesus, ver. 17, 18. *Now then it is no more I*---Paul, in himself, can do nothing, is worse than nothing; but Paul, in Christ, can do all things. It was not Paul in Christ that sinned, but Paul in himself. After his conversion, there was an *I* in him, a new creature, that could clear itself of every sin, saying, it was not I that did it, but the old man. Take heed to this, ye that are yet unregenerate: ye cannot speak in Paul's stile, when ye fall into sin. The load of the guilt must ly upon your whole self. Ye have not an innocent part within you. Ye are not split into a new man and an old, into flesh and spirit, but you are wholly flesh; ye are wholly a lump and mass of sin; but a regenerate man, as such, is born of God; and *whatsoever is born of God sinneth not.* 1 John iii. 9.

3. I observe, that Paul, in his combat with sin, is not irritated against the law, which forbids sin; but loves and approves every part of it, verse 7. *What shall we say, then, is the law sin? God forbid.* And again, verse 12. *Therefore the law is holy.* The natural man's corruptions are irritated by the law, like the water that runs the more furiously by being dammed up; but the spiritual man, amidst his sorest struggles with sin, honours the law in his heart, and chearfully

fully acquiesces in that part of it which strikes against the sins that more easily beset him. The natural man does, in his heart, and it may be with his lips too, reproach the holy Lawgiver, as if he had, by his law, made the way so very narrow, that there is no possibility of walking in it without being cramped and pinched; Psal. ii. 3. Whereas, he that is renewed, walks in the way of the law with ease and pleasure.

4. I observe, that the Apostle was a person deeply exercised about the sinfulness both of his heart and life. The expressions, I know, I find, I see, not only import his success in heart-searching work, but likewise his frequency and continuance in it. Had we more of his spirit, we would be more employed in this work; we would be more at home, and less abroad.

I come now to shew, what is implied in this groaning of the regenerate, under the remains of sin in them.

And here, it is supposed, that believers are freed from the guilt of sin, which is an obligation to eternal wrath. They are in Christ; and there is no condemnation to such as are in him. *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect. It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth.* Their remaining sin may bring them under the guilt of Fatherly anger; but his loving-kindness he will never take away from them.

It is here also supposed, that they are delivered from the reigning power and dominion of sin, Rom. vi. 14. Sin reigns in unbelievers like a king upon his throne; it absolutely prevails over them; but it is not

so with believers. Christ is enthroned in their hearts, and sin is dethroned, and they are not from thenceforth subject unto it, nor do they serve it. Howbeit, by reason of the imperfection of sanctification, there are remains of sin in believers; and that is the cause of their groaning and longing for deliverance. Now, this implies,

1. Their feeling the motions of sin in them. Paul felt them; and O how feelingly does he speak of them, Rom. vii. 21, 23. No man will groan under an unfelt burden; and hence it is, that the unregenerate do not groan under sin, though it absolutely prevails over them. Let the heaviest load be laid upon a dead man, yet he will not groan: He will not cry, nor make the least motion; and why? Even because being dead, he has no sense nor feeling. So the chains and fetters of guilt, lying on natural men, do not make them groan, because, being dead in trespasses and sins, they are void of all sense and feeling. But the remains of sin in believers, are like the bolts about the prisoner's legs after he is let out of prison, which, although they do not absolutely hinder their motion upwards to the hill of God, yet they retard it; they cramp, pain, and pinch them so, that they groan for deliverance.

Now, there are three things which contribute to the believer's feeling the motions of sin, that cause groaning. These are. *first*, the quick sensation of the new creature. Among men there is a great difference as to the quickness of sensation. Some are more sensible than others of the least touch. And so it is among irrational creatures. Now, altho' some of the old man's motions are greater, some lesser, and some least of all, yet the new
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creature, God's spiritual workmanship, is such a very delicate creature, that it presently feels them, and falls a resisting, wrestling, and groaning. The eye, and especially the apple of the eye, being the tenderest part of the body, feels the least touch. So the new creature is a tender creature; and therefore feels the first risings of the old man.

Secondly, The frequency of these motions cause them to be felt. The old man is only evil, and continually evil. He is never at rest, but is always plotting mischief. If he is overcome, he endeavours to gather strength again, and to rally his broken forces. If he overcomes, then he triumphs, and leads the soul captive for a while, Rom. vii. 23. Whatever way the soul is employed, either in religious duties, or in civil affairs, in public, or private, or secret, the old man ceases not to fight against him; and his motions being so frequent, the soul cannot miss feeling them.

Thirdly, The violence of them causes them to be felt. Sin sometimes fawns and flatters; sometimes it foams and rages, and has such an impetuous force with it, that it is like to carry all before it. That was a violent effort of the old man, that had almost thrown the good man Asaph into the gulph of atheism, Psal. lxxiii. 13. He could not resist the first onset, it was so very fierce; but he did not ly where he fell; he wrestled to his feet again, ver. 21, 22, 23. Thus, I say, the motions of the old man in believers, are frequent and violent; and therefore cannot but cause pain; and they who feel pain are allowed to groan.

2. This groaning implies, the intense sorrow of believers on the account of sin, Zech. xii. 10. 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. Deep sorrow in the heart makes the countenance

tenance heavy, and is the cause of sending forth heavy groans. Yea, sometimes the hearts of the saints are so filled with godly sorrow for sin, that they cannot utter words, but sighs and groans; and this, not because they cannot get words, but because they cannot get vent for them: like a crowd of people thronging to get out at a door, they stick so fast together, that none of them can get before the other. When the prophet Nathan was sent to convict David of his murder and adultery, after the prophet has laid before him the hainous nature and aggravations of his sin, all that David says is, *I have sinned against the Lord*, 2 Sam. xii. 13. At first view, we would think that short speech shewed little sense of sin or sorrow for it; but it was not so. David's heart was then so filled, as we say, that he could not express himself; and he had at that time the seeds of the 51st Psalm working in his breast, in which he falls to searching and mourning afresh. And that this was the frame of the man's spirit, seems plain from the pardon that Nathan, in the Lord's name, intimates to him: *And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die.* The like may be observed of the poor Publican, who smote on his breast, and cried, *God be merciful to me a sinner.* The Lord knew that these few words proceeded from an heart humbled and full of sorrow; and therefore they were acceptable unto him; while the Pharisee's many words, flowing from an heart proud and void of sorrow, were an abomination unto him.

3. This groaning speaks the believer's wrestling against sin, Ephes. vi. 12. Gal. v. 17. Fighting and wrestling causes weariness; and weariness causes groaning

ing and longing for rest. The exclamation in the text, was the issue of a hot conflict that the Apostle had with sin remaining in him. Could the difference betwixt the old man and the new man be compounded, there would be no more wrestling betwixt them; and so the one would not groan, and the other would not grudge: or, if either of them possessed the house alone, there would be no wrestling and groaning. But matters stand quite otherwise: there is no possibility of reconciling the contending parties. You may as easily bring East and West, light and darkness together, as reconcile them. Christ, by his death, reconciled God and man; but he put enmity between the old man and the new. And if there be no struggle occasioned thereby in your breast, this death is not yet made effectual unto you. And as to either of them possessing the house; I say, if ye are not yet renewed, but are wholly flesh, then the old man is sole possessor; and then no wonder ye do not groan, for ye are dead. Now, groaning proceeds from life, and is a sign of it. And as for the new man possessing the house alone; that is not to be expected: he will still have a competitor till he get to heaven, his own country, from whence he came; and then and there he will reign *through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Therefore, my brethren, fighting, wrestling, and groaning, is the best that can be made of it in this imperfect state. And the consideration hereof serves to obviate an objection that believers are often making against themselves. They feel so much atheism, unbelief, carnality, formality, pride and hypocrisy in themselves, that they conclude they have no grace at all.

all. Why, my brethren, I grant the premisses may be true; but the conclusion is false. Do not ye feel all this whereof ye complain? do not ye groan under it, and wrestle under it? Yea, surely. Well, then, I ask, Is not feeling, fighting, groaning, wrestling, the work of a living man? Yea, is it not the work of the new man which God has created in you, to bear down, and at length to break down and cast out for altogether, that atheism, &c. whereof ye complain?

4. This groaning includes believers sense of their utter inability to deliver themselves. Paul was a strong Christian, yet he saw this Philistine to be too strong an enemy for him. He saw he could not, of himself, master this old man; therefore he cries out, *Who shall deliver me?* And presently he spies out the deliverer, even Jesus Christ, and gives him solemn thanks, ver. 25. Thus also is it with all believers: They are in themselves weak, unable to resist the smallest temptation. Every one of them has a greater or lesser sense of this; as David said upon the death of Abner; *And I am this day weak, though anointed king, and these men, the sons of Zeruiab, be too hard for me.* So every believer may say, though I be anointed with an unction of the Holy One, yet I am in myself but weak; and my lusts, these sons of Satan, these brats of hell, be too hard for me.

5. This groaning intimates to us, the believers earnest desire of deliverance from the body of death. The men of the world cry, *Who will show us any good?* But the righteous cry, *Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?* O how different cries are these! and this is the believer's constant cry; this is the habitual desire of his soul. All the endeavours
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of believers are bended this way. For this end they pray, they praise, they read, they hear, they communicate. They exercise all their graces, and perform all their duties, with a view to get their old man brought lower and lower, till at last they be altogether delivered from him: Nay, so earnest is their desire of deliverance, that they welcome two things, which are most unwelcome to the unbelieving world: These are afflictions and death. They welcome the cross, as it is a mean in the hand of God for subduing sin in them, and making them partakers of the divine holiness. They welcome the hot furnace, in the hope of getting their dross purged away by it: for though they feel it painful, they find it profitable. They welcome death itself, as that which compleats their deliverance from the body of sin. We that are in this body groan earnestly, that *Mortality may be swallowed up of life*. Death, absolutely considered, is not desirable. We groan, says Paul, not for that we would be unclothed, but *cloathed upon*; but considered as a mean of compleat deliverance from the body of sin.

6. This groaning signifies, the believer's hope and expectation of deliverance from the body of death. Thus, the Apostle, after groaning, immediately subjoins a word which implies hope. *I thank God thro' Jesus Christ our Lord*. And it were well, if believers would learn of the Apostle here, to mix their complaints with hope, and their groans with thanksgiving. The old man may prevail far, but he shall not prevail finally. The new man shall at length be more than a conqueror over him. Let the groaning soul, then, lift up his head with joy, for *the day of his re-*

demption draweth nigh. And let the believer in Christ expostulate with himself, as David does, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*

I proceed now to consider the reasons of the doctrine; or, to shew whence it is that believers long so much to be delivered from sin remaining in them. And,

First, The body of sin is that which God hates; so that *he cannot look upon it without abhorrence.* How then can the saints but groan for deliverance from it. One person may have so great love to another, as to overlook his faults; but though God loveth the righteous with an unchangeable and everlasting love, yet he cannot but hate sin in them, and, in the way of fatherly anger, chastise them for the out-breakings thereof, Amos iii. 2. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.* This is a way of reasoning worthy of God, who must needs abhor sin wherever and in whomsoever he sees it. It is the very reverse of his holy nature and perfections. It is a state of enmity to his interests, and strikes at his very being. It would even dethrone the Most High. Oh, then, what an evil and a bitter thing must it be. The Apostle, not knowing, as it were, how to express the malignant nature of it, calls it exceeding sinful. And it is observable, that the Spirit of God, all along thro' the Bible, gives it and its servants the worst of names. Sometimes it is compared to poison, and sinners to serpents. Sometimes to mire, and sinners to swine. Sometimes to a tyrant, and sinners to slaves. These are the names by which God, who miscalls none, calls sin and sinners. Though sin be his greatest enemy,

my, yet he will not slander it. No wonder, then, though the faints groan and are heavy of heart, that the least lith or limb, root or branch of God's greatest enemy, should be within their breast.

Secondly, It is the body of sin which pollutes and defiles their souls. It is the most filthy thing. And hence it is, that our sanctification is compared to washing, cleansing, and purifying. It defiles instantly and universally; and the stain it leaves upon the soul, is so deep and inveterate, that all the waters on earth cannot wash it away. There was once a deluge of water let in upon the world, which washed away the sinners indeed; but it neither did nor could wash off one sin. And at the last day, that dreadful fire which will burn up the sinful world, and the sinners therein, will not be able to purge away sin. Howbeit, there is one thing, and but one thing that can carry it off; and that is the blood of Jesus Christ. This bears up the faints. Were it not for this, they would sink altogether under the pressure of sin.

Thirdly, It is the body of sin that so often interrupts their communion and fellowship with God, Isaiah lix. 2. This communion is the faints heaven upon earth. It is the one thing which they desire above all things under the sun: and therefore, when it is suspended, ye hear them crying with Job, *O that it were with me as in months past*. And then they cry, *Wo unto us for we have sinned*. They suspect the hand of Joab to be in this suspension of their comfort. Sin is of a quarrelsome nature; it deals in whispering and creating jealousies, in order to cast out and separate chief friends. It cast the angels out of heaven; Adam out of paradise; Cain out of the church; the

Jews out of their dwellings; and it oftentimes casts the saints under God's fatherly displeasure. When they are taken into the presence chamber, and enjoy sensible communion and manifestations of the love and glory of God, their pride, security, carnality, or some other sin, creeps in upon them, which provokes God to withdraw the light of his countenance; and then they go mourning in the bitterness of their souls. Now, since the old man is such a fire-brand, need we wonder that believers send forth groans for deliverance from it.

Fourthly, It is the body of sin that indisposes them for the service of God: yea, it vigorously opposes them in all their motions toward God and Christ, Rom. vii. 21, 23. *I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.* My brethren, this is the thief which robs you of your lively frame; which takes away the living child ye are so fond of, and puts a dead one in its room. It is this which occasions deadness and inactivity for duties, public, private, and secret. It is this which makes you apt to weary in well doing. It is this same old man, whose office and interest it is to fight against the new man created by Christ Jesus.

The holy angels are swift in doing the will of God; for *he maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.* The saints in heaven never err, nor weary in his service: And that because sin had never any place in the former; and it is utterly expelled in the latter. But the saints below are in the
dust;

dust; the blood and the noise of the battle. Sin, in part, cleaves unto them. It is like the prisoners bolts upon their legs, that makes them to halt in walking up the hill of God; therefore they groan.

Fifthly, It is the body of sin that not only indisposes them for that which is good, but likewise drives them on to that which is evil. Of this the apostle complains heavily, Rom. vii. 15. *For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not, but what I hate, that do I*: and to the same purpose he complains in the nineteenth verse. It is a very malignant influence, which the old man has, when he indisposes the saints for doing good: but O how deplorable is their case, when he pushes them forward into sin; when he not only indisposes them for the great duties of believing, hoping, rejoicing, and patient bearing the cross, but likewise runs them upon the dreadful rocks of misbelieving, desponding, and murmuring against God. Moreover, all the out-breakings, small and great, in the lives of the saints, which give scandal unto others, are the effects of this old man, which is corrupt. These furnish another reason why believers groan for deliverance.

Sixthly, It is the body of sin that is the cause of their slow advances in sanctification. Believers, what is the reason, that when the means of grace are so rich, and your opportunities so great, your progress in the good ways of God is so slow and so small? What is the reason of this languishing, meagre face of yours, when ye have such plenty of heavenly manna? why so little conformity to Christ? why so little of his spirit and way to be seen about you? is not all this owing to the body of this death? Well, there-
fore,

fore, may ye cry out with the Apostle, Who shall deliver you from it?

Lastly, It is the body of sin that makes believers so often a prey to Satan and the world. Hence our Lord bids his disciples *watch and pray*. And poor Peter, who had been almost destroyed out of hand by the roaring lion, sounds the alarm unto all believers, that they be upon their watch tower, 1 Peter v. 8. *Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* Satan and the world may offer and urge the temptation, but unless something within us comply with it, we are safe. They, indeed, bring the fire, but the stubble, fully dry, is within our breast, which causes the flame. They shoot the arrows; and we, by reason of sin remaining, are like a thin soft partition wall, easily pierced, and in which the arrows stick, not like the flinty rock, which beats them back in the face of those who threw them. How natural, then, is it to groan for deliverance from that which betrays them so often into the hands of their greatest enemies?

I shall now pass on to a word of application. And, *First*, From what has been said, we may in general see the malignant nature of sin. It has disturbed the beautiful order which God established in this world, and changed every thing for the worse. From whence come wars and tumults? what has turned the once beautiful garden of this world into a wilderness of nettles, and thorns, and briars? what has turned it from a palace to an hospital, and filled it with groanings, howlings, and complaints of various kinds, so that few but fools laugh in it? Why, all this is produced

produced by sin. Sin, alas, has poisoned all our springs of comfort, and made them run with bitterness, lamentation, and woe. Above all, it is the founder of Tophet; the adequate cause of all the misery in the world to come.

Secondly, Here we see what sort of life believers are to expect in this world. It is not a life of ease, nor of prophane mirth and jollity, but a life that resembles the life of Christ in the world, who *was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. The true Christian must be a runner, a fighter, a wrestler, a labourer, a groaner: and if these characters be consistent with the prophane, careless, easy and useless life which many professors lead, let conscience judge. Alas! how many are there among us, who, instead of daily groaning under the body of sin, have never to this day had one hour's serious reflection upon their lost state by nature. This alarming condition never robbed them of one night's rest; never blew up any of their worldly projects; never stopped their sinful mirth, or damped their proud spirit: and yet, amazement! such persons will hope for heaven!

Thirdly, Here is comfort to real believers, who are groaning under the remains of sin in them. My brethren, there has no temptation befallen you, but what is common to men; yea, and to the most holy of meer men that ever were. The great Apostle presents himself, in this chapter, as your companion in tribulation. If he, with all his gifts and graces, was a groaner, what can you expect? But believers may object, Alas! unrenewed men may struggle against sin, and groan under it, as well as we. How then shall we know the difference?

I shall

I shall conclude the subject in answering this.

It is allowed, that both have strugglings against sin; but the difference is great. For, *first*, A natural man's struggle against sin arises from a natural conscience; whereas, a regenerate man's struggle arises from the new nature in him. In the latter, there is a holy principle, that strives against all sin; whereas, in the former, there is nothing but an old corrupt principle, which, upon some defective considerations, strives against some sins. Which leads me to observe,

Secondly, They differ in their motives. The unrenewed man struggles against sin, because it is damning; the renewed man, because it is also defiling. The former considers sin as it disturbs the conscience, as it exposes to eternal wrath, or as it is inconsistent with some particular profit which he has in view. Hence his struggles arise. But the latter considers sin also, as it is an abomination to God, a transgression of his law, and a defilement of the soul. Hence he bends all his force against it.

Again, There is a difference also in the extent of the struggle. The renewed man, although his foremost struggles are with the sins which more easily beset him, yet he struggles against every known sin, and against the first appearances of it: but the unrenewed man struggles only against some particular sins, which, from constitution, custom, education, or some other circumstance, he can more easily abstain from. As for some others, he rolls them as a sweet morsel under his tongue. There are certain favourite lusts, which he still harbours and gratifies, according to their respective cravings. Examine yourselves in this point,

point, my brethren. See if your struggle be universal. See if there be any Achan in the camp, which you have no will to bring forth that he may be stoned. If it is so, be assured your struggle is not the struggle of the new creature, but of the natural conscience.

In the *last* place, There is a difference also in the continuance of the battle. The renewed man continues the struggle till he obtain the victory. It is not a war for a day or two about the time of a communion, when the arrows of the word are flying thick about his ears; but it is a war kept up till death: whereas, in an unrenewed man, the cause of the war being the clamours of natural conscience, it comes to an end upon the proclamation of false peace in the soul.

S E R M O N IV.

How the SON glorified the FATHER
in the work of Redemption.

JOHN xvii. 4. *I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*

THE best of all Sermons, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters, is concluded with the best of all prayers in this seventeenth chapter. It is a great blessing to the Christian church, that they both stand upon record. In this chapter is contained the Lord's prayer, properly so called: for what we commonly call the Lord's prayer, was but a pattern or example of prayer, which he gave his disciples, for their direction and assistance in that duty; whereas, this is our Lord's own prayer, the prayer which he put up to his Father before his passion.

The Saviour of the world was a praying Saviour. He spent whole nights in that exercise. What a great privilege had these who at any time heard him pray; and how should it endear the duty of prayer unto us, that we should have it enjoined both by the precept and example of the Son of God?

May I therefore be allowed to take two sentences of this most excellent prayer, which dropt from the divine lips of our dearest Redeemer, and make them the subject of preaching at this time. *I have glorified thee on the earth, &c.*

He

He was now ready to be offered, and the time of his departure was at hand; and he was able to make a very good account of what he had been doing in the world, particularly of that great and important business which his Father had sent him thither to negotiate.

He declares, that he had glorified his Father on the earth. His Father's glory was always before him. This was what he principally intended in all that he did and suffered.

Next, he declares how, or by what means he had thus glorified his Father, namely, by finishing the work which he gave him to do. This is the work of our redemption; a work in which the glory of God was much concerned, and a work which none was fit to undertake and finish, but he to whom the Father gave it.

To glorify, is either to confer glory upon one which he had not before, (and so God glorifieth us,) or to manifest, acknowledge and declare that glory which one is already possessed of; and in this sense only it is that any can glorify God. Thus angels and men glorify him. Neither was it possible that Christ the Mediator could glorify him any other way than by manifesting his glory: for his essential glory can have nothing added unto it, nor yet any thing taken from it.

Observe likewise, the place where he glorified him, viz. the earth. Here, and only here, was our blessed Lord to be in a state of humiliation and abasement; here he was to work; afterwards he was to receive the full reward; here it behoved him to suffer, and afterwards to enter into his glory.

But why does he say, that he had finished the work which his Father gave him, when his death, burial, resurrection and ascension were yet before him? *Answer.* What is certainly and quickly to be done, is sometimes spoken of as if it were already done. Our Lord was firmly resolved to make himself an offering for sin. The time was now drawing nigh, and his heart was so vehemently set upon it, that he anticipates it, and speaks as if it were already done.

Thus God says to Abraham, *Thou hast not withheld thine only son.* And the Apostle says, that he offered him up, because he had firmly purposed and resolved so to do, and had therefore given up with his interest and concern in him.

OBSERVATION. Jesus Christ highly glorified his Father, by finishing the work of our redemption, which was committed unto him.

In discoursing upon this subject, I shall, through divine assistance,

I. Shew you why the work of redemption was committed to the Son.

II. How the Son finished the work of our redemption, which the Father had committed unto him. And,

LASTLY. That the Father was highly glorified by the Son's finishing the work of our redemption.

I. If any ask why the work of redemption was committed to the Son, I answer in one word, because he only was fit and able to undertake it. Great undertakings require proportionable abilities: but this was an undertaking of such huge weight, as would have

have baffled all the angels in heaven, tho' they are said to excel in strength.

To illustrate this, let us consider a little this work which our Lord undertook. And,

1. He was to repair the injured honour of God, and satisfy his justice to the utmost of its demands. Great dishonour was reflected upon God by man's sin, and as a compensation for that, God must needs have honour reflected upon him, by one equal with himself. Now this we plainly see could only be done by our Redeemer, who was God-man. The united stock of angels and men could not have paid one farthing, far less the uttermost farthing, to divine justice. As for men, the whole race was absolutely bankrupt; and as for angels, though they had something for themselves, yet they could spare nothing to us. Had we offered to borrow of them, they would have answered as the wise virgins, Mat. xxv. 9. *Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you.*

But as our Redeemer had all the riches of a God-head, he was fit and able to undertake our ransom.

2dly, He was to save precious souls. The redemption of that deathless thing, called the soul, is precious, and would have ceased for ever, if Christ had not undertaken the same. It cannot be *redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb*, 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. *Without shedding of blood there is no remission; Therefore a body was prepared him.* And because no blood but the blood of God, was of value sufficient to atone for guilty souls, the human nature and the divine were united together in the one person of the Son;

Son, whereby the blood of the man Christ was also the blood of God, Acts xx. 28.

3dly, He was to subdue and bruise Satan under his feet. So much is contained in the first promise made after the fall, Gen. iii. 15. Not long after God had finished his works, and beheld them with complacency, Satan came in upon them, like a rude person into a fine artist's shop, and defiled and destroyed them, and then he brought in sin and death, which were his own works.

But it was not consistent with the honour of God, that the devil should thus triumph over elect stones lying in rubbish, and that he should erect, as it were, a monarchy in the world: wherefore *the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil*. And certainly none but he, who was the wisdom of God, and the power of God, could have spoiled principalities and powers, and made an open shew of them.

Here, then, is a mighty work; a grand undertaking. The injured honour of God must be repaired, guilty souls saved, Satan subdued and bruised under foot. Now say, who in heaven or in earth was fit for such an undertaking but the son of God? Applaud, admire, and adore the infinite wisdom of the Father, in giving this great work into such an able hand; as also, the unspeakable grace and condescension of the Son, in that he did not refuse to be concerned with it, but frankly undertook it, and fully finished it.

This leads me next to shew how the Son finished this work of our redemption, which the Father had committed unto him. And,

1st, He

1st, He began the mighty undertaking in his incarnation. *The children being partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same*, Heb. ii. 14. And thus he became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, even our kinsman Redeemer.

He brought into the world with him a holy, spotless human nature, and that by way of atonement for our bringing into the world a sinful corrupted nature; *Likewise that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God*, Luke i. 35.

The man Christ Jesus is the only man that ever was born holy. Angels were created holy. The first man and his companion were created holy; but to be born holy, was never known or heard of in the world: nor was there ever such a thing, in fact, until Jesus Christ came into it.

2^{dly}, He carried on this mighty undertaking throughout his life, which was spotlessly pure, and holy, Heb. vii. 26. 1 Pet. ii. 21, 22. The holy law was laid before him in its spirituality and vast extent, and he obeyed every article of it.

The whole course of his life in the world, was such a pattern of unspotted purity and holiness, as is altogether unexampled in the history of mankind.

I know, some divines make a difficulty of admitting his active obedience to be any part of his undertaking for us, reckoning that it was due on his own account, as he was man. But it must be considered, that he was God as well as man; and that the obedience he gave to the law, had the special worth and dignity in it, that it was the obedience of the person of the Son, God-man.

Moreover, he came into the world for this very end,

end, that he might fulfil the law for us: hence he is said to have been *made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law*. All other moral agents, whether angels or men, are under the law for themselves; but Christ's being made under the law, was not for himself, but for us who had transgressed it. If Christ then fulfilled the law, not absolutely as man, but as God-man our Mediator; if his coming under the law was in consequence of the agreement betwixt him and his Father, about the redemption of the world, his active, as well as his passive obedience, must be considered as part of the price of that redemption.

3dly, He finished this mighty undertaking by his death and resurrection. This the scripture every where teacheth. *He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*, Rom. iv. ult. *He made peace by the blood of his cross*, Col. i. 20. *He bare our sins in his own body upon the tree*, 1 Pet. ii. 24. *He suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God. By one offering he hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified*, Heb. x. 14. Hereby he fulfilled the original promise of the seed of the woman's bruising the serpent's head, with all the subsequent confirmations and illustrations of it, which any of the Old Testament church were favoured with.

He fulfilled all the predictions concerning him, which were declared to the church by the ancient Prophets. Holy men of old saw both his debasement and his glory, his humiliation, and his exaltation; and they spake of them as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Our blessed Saviour manifested himself to be the
Messiah

Messiah prophesied of in the Old Testament; for as much as every thing there spoken concerning the Messiah was exactly fulfilled in him. And it is very certain, that it was no small confirmation of the truth of Christianity to some more inquisitive persons among the Heathens, who became Christians, that they found in the ancient Jewish records, a most minute and circumstantial account of the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, many years before he came into the world.

Thus the Old Testament, the Bible of the Jews, contains in it the confirmation of our faith, and the condemnation of their unbelief: for nothing but obstinate and resolved infidelity can hinder them from seeing, that all the predictions concerning the Messiah are fulfilled and finished in Jesus of Nazareth.

He fulfilled all the types, figures, and ceremonies of the law, which were originally instituted in reference unto him and his sacrifice. Christ is the true tabernacle and temple, who hath all the holy things in him. Here is the Schecinah, the divine majesty appearing in our nature. Here is the ark, where the tables of the law, broken by men, are kept inviolate. Here is the mercy seat, or propitiary, which covers our sins, and from whence God communes with us in words of grace. Here is the vail, the flesh of Christ, which covered his deity, and through which there is a way into heaven itself.

Hence, at his death, the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. This was the curtain or vail, which separated the most holy place from the sanctuary: and some say, that the prodigy happened at the very time the high priest was mini-

string in the holy place before the ark, mercy seat, and cherubims. Hereby was signified, that the whole ceremonial law was fulfilled and finished: that henceforth it was to be folded up and laid aside, as an old garment which God was pleased to wear in the immature ages of the church; and that now a way was to be made for the purity and simplicity of the gospel worship.

Thus Christ fulfilled the law, both moral and ceremonial: thus he finished the work which his Father had given him to do. And he finished it fully and compleatly, both as to parts and degrees.

1st, He finished it in all its parts. He did not do some things, and leave other things undone; but he did every thing. He fulfilled the law in every demand, and satisfied justice to the uttermost farthing. As he said to his enemies, *which of you convinceth me of sin?* So he may say to greater than they, even to the law, even to the justice of God, wherein can ye find any spot in me? Demand to the utmost farthing, abate nothing, I ask no discount, but am ready to discharge all.

2^{dly}, He finished it to the highest degree. His obedience was not only perfect in respect of parts, but it was screwed up to the highest pitch of perfection. He not only loved God, but he loved him as much as the law required. All his graces, all his works were in the highest degree of perfection; so that the curious, critical and piercing eye of Jehovah, who *chargeth even his angels with folly*, could not find the least failing or imperfection in any part of his Son's undertaking.

Finally, There was in his work a perfection of duration

duration or continuance. Adam's obedience was to be perfect, not only in respect of parts and degrees, but likewise in respect of continuance. How long Adam was to have continued in a state of trial, we cannot tell; but as it was a state of trial, he could continue in it only for a time, supposing him to have stood, and not for ever.

In like manner, our blessed Lord did not finish this great and important work all of a sudden, but took a course of years for the same. He made the world in six days, but he was thirty-three years in redeeming it. In the work of the old creation, he exerted his power without any opposition; but in the work of the new creation, he meets with a great deal of opposition: Howbeit, his wisdom and his power are match and more for every foe.

I come now, in the *third* place, to shew you, that the Father was highly glorified by the Son's finishing the work of our redemption.

Never was there, or will there be, I may say, unto eternity, any thing that reflected so much glory and honour upon God the Father, as did this same undertaking. His law was more magnified and made honourable, by the Son of God's active and passive obedience unto it, for the time he was in the world, and a greater honour was put upon a state of obedience, than if all mankind, and all the angelic kind, had continued obedient unto eternity.

All the works of God praise him; the heavens and the earth declare his glory; day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowlege. The day bears testimony to his being and perfections; and when the day declines, the testimony for God which

it bore, is given to the night, and the night delivers it over into the hands of the succeeding morning: and thus it will be faithfully transmitted, until days, and years, and time shall be no more.

But I may say of the work of creation, compared with that of redemption, *even that which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth*, 2 Cor. iii. 10. In the work of redemption, finished by Jesus Christ, the divine attributes and perfections are made to shine with a far more resplendent lustre and beauty, than by any other work besides.

To illustrate this a little, consider,

1st, How highly the justice of God is glorified in the work finished by the Son, Rom. iii. 25, 26. My brethren, the justice of God makes a glorious figure in the law, where it is hedged about with promises on the one hand, and with the most severe threatenings on the other: it was displayed with awful splendor in casting the angels that sinned down to hell, in destroying the old world by a deluge of water, and Sodom and Gomorrah by brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. But the Son of God, hanging upon a cross, betwixt two thieves, till he was as dead as ever a man was, is the most awful evidence of the rectitude of the divine nature, and of the divine displeasure against sin, that ever was or shall be, until the judgment of the great day.

2^{dly}, The shining holiness of God was highly glorified by this undertaking of his Son. Whoso duly considers the divine nature, must needs be sensible, that his holiness is as great a bar in the way of sinners unto him as his justice; for he is of purer eyes than

than to behold evil, and he cannot so much as look upon iniquity.

But he who undertook the work of our redemption was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He was the Lamb of God, without spot or blemish. He did no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth: all which reflected great honour upon the holiness of that God who had chosen him for a Mediator.

And then, in this undertaking, he not only offered his blood by way of atonement unto the justice of God for sinners, but he likewise sprinkles it upon them for their sanctification; that being made holy, a holy God may vouchsafe to hold communion with them. Now, by the cleansing virtue of the blood of Christ, the holiness of God is magnified and made honourable; and not only will it no more stand in the way of the salvation of sinners, but it is solemnly sworn to save them, Psal. lxxxix. 35.

3dly, Hereby the wisdom of God is highly glorified. The holy Apostle of the Gentiles, in contemplation of the several parts of the œconomy of grace in man's redemption, cries out in a rapture and transport of soul, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowlege of God!* Rom. ii. 35. Yea, the glorious angels, whose concern in the work of redemption is not equal with ours, do with pleasure and admiration contemplate the wisdom of God appearing therein, Eph. iii. 10. 1 Pet. i. 12.

What but infinite and adorable wisdom could have found out a way, whereby God should be glorified, sinners saved, and Satan confounded. All the angels in heaven, though they excel in wisdom, knowlege, and

and sagacity, could never have found out a way of saving sinners to the glory of the divine perfections. Had they been set upon it, after the longest and deepest deliberation, they would have returned this verdict, We know not the way.

But God, only wise, found out the scheme, whereby mercy and truth should meet together, and righteousness and peace should embrace one another. The creation of the world is a display of infinite wisdom; so also is the administration of providence in it: but the redemption of the world, the work of the new creation, committed to Jesus Christ, is a master-piece of wisdom; and will be the object of admiration unto saints and angels, when the heavens and the earth shall be no more.

attly, Hereby the power of God is highly glorified, Eph. i. 19, 20. How glorious does it appear in the constitution of the person of Christ, God-man. Himself ascribes the preparing of his body to the power of his Father, Heb. x. 5. The rearing up a tabernacle, wherein the Godhead should actually dwell, was such an instance of divine power, as has not a parallel. Hence the apostle does, by way of eminency, call it a tabernacle, not of this building, that is, not of the same rank or order with any thing else that ever God created.

What an exceeding greatness of power was put forth, in supporting the man Christ under all his sufferings; in carrying him thro' death, and bringing him up from the grave, and setting him at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens? What a mighty power was it that spoiled principalities and powers, and made an open shew of them?

The

The same exceeding greatness of power is displayed in the redemption, conversion and sanctification of sinners. To quicken the dead in trespasses and sins, to deliver captives, and set prisoners free, to turn sinners into saints, lions into lambs, and dragons into doves, are all of them most glorious displays of the mighty power of God.

5thly, The truth and faithfulness of God are highly glorified hereby. Elizabeth and Mary, and old Zacharias, who were living at the dawning of the Gospel dispensation, saw in it, and proclaimed in their songs, the glory of the divine faithfulness, Luke i. 45.---54, 55.

The promises, on which the Old Testament Church lived for four thousand years, were fulfilled in this undertaking of the Son: so also were the predictions concerning him; and the whole ceremonial law had its complement and perfection in him.

Lastly, The grace, mercy and love of God were hereby greatly glorified. *God is love; and herein is the love of God manifested, in that he sent his Son into the world to suffer and die for us.*

God is gracious and merciful, and the immense riches of his mercy are displayed, and the mine of them broken up in Jesus Christ. He was the mercy promised unto the fathers of old, as Zacharias speaks in his song, Luke i. 72.

We find the church, in the 136th Psalm, magnifying the mercy of God, for the many temporal deliverances which he had wrought on her behalf; and the burthen of the song is still, *his mercy endureth for ever*, repeated no less than twenty-six times.

My brethren, might not a Christian turn that
Psalm

Psalm into gospel-language, into a hymn of thanksgiving unto Jesus Christ, saying, O give thanks unto our Redeemer; for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who said, Lo I come; for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who was born in a stable and laid in a manger; for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who fulfilled the law for us, in the whole course of his life; for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who expired upon a cross, and was laid dead in a grave for us; for his mercy endureth for ever. To him who rose again from the dead, and ascended up into heaven to manage our affairs there; for his mercy endureth for ever.

USE I. Has Jesus Christ finished the work which his Father gave him to do, even the work of our redemption? Then allow me to make the Apostle's inference, Rom. viii. 1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.* He says not, that there is nothing condemnable in them. Sin in a believer is worthy of condemnation, as well as in another. But the believer being in Christ, who has finished the work of redemption, fulfilled the law, and satisfied justice to the uttermost, there is no actual condemnation for him.

He said to the law and justice, concerning the elect, as he said to them who came to apprehend him; *If ye seek me, let these go their ways.* He said to his Father concerning a guilty elect world, as Paul said to Philemon concerning Onesimus, *If they have wronged thee, or owe thee ought, put that on mine account.*

2dly, Did Christ finish his work? Here is comfort to sincere Christians under the imperfections of their best works. Alas, my brethren, the best among us offend

offend and come short in every thing we put our hand to. Had we nothing to answer for but the iniquity of holy things, it would be enough to condemn us. Some things we forget to do, and other things we marr in the doing. Sometimes we mistake in the matter of our duty: at other times we err in the manner of doing. But the sincere Christian may comfort himself with this consideration, that Jesus Christ, appearing before God in his room and stead, fulfilled all righteousness; and that God is so well pleased with what his Son did, that, for his sake, he will accept of our honest and sincere, though weak and imperfect endeavours, to serve him.

3dly, Has Christ finished his work for us? Then, certainly, he will finish his work in us. If his blood was shed for our justification, it will certainly be sprinkled upon us for our sanctification. If he has procured for us a legal claim and title unto heaven, he will prepare us for it, in respect of the temper of our minds, by implanting in us the seeds, habits, and principles of holiness and new obedience.

4thly, Did Christ finish his work? Then, what an indignity do these put upon him, who join our good works with his most perfect righteousness for justification, and who join angels or saints with him in the office of Mediator?

Is not this a denying that he has finished his work, and a charging it with imperfection, until something of ours be added unto it? and oh, what a foul reproach does this cast upon the person and sacrifice of the Son of God?

Is there not merit enough in his blood to justify sinners, and what good work is any person able to per-

form prior to justification? why will we defile the fountain of blood? why will we mix the wine with water, and with foul water too? why will we sew old rotten rags upon fine new cloth?

How dare any take it upon them to give the Son of God colleagues in his office of Mediator? I can assure you there is no such thing in heaven, whatever the church of Rome may dream. All the angels that worship him, and all the saints, cast down the crowns at his feet, as being ashamed to wear them in his presence.

I know they alledge, that departed saints are more filled with compassion at the case of saints below than Jesus Christ, because they have had full experience of their state and condition.

But I dare pawn mine own soul upon it, that there is more sympathy, tenderness and compassion in the heart of the man Christ Jesus, towards all his members, than there is in any or all the angels, or among all the saints either in heaven or in earth, suppose it were all centred in one person.

5thly, Has Christ finished his work? Let us remember that this does not supersede, but strengthen our obligations to an universally holy walk and conversation. *Do we then make void the law through faith? Nay, we rather establish it,* Rom. iii. ult. The doctrine of grace, rightly understood and improved, is the greatest friend to morality, and is absolutely the firmest base and center that ever the law of God was fixt upon. And I know not if there can be a more monstrous and shocking perverting a thing from its proper use, than to improve Christ his fulfilling the law into a regardlessness of that law in our life,

life, or to sin, that grace may abound. A sober minded person must tremble, to think how dreadfully God will revenge such an affront as this cast upon his holy One, and upon the work undertaken by him.

O then, my brethren, let not Christ's finishing his work make you to remit any thing of your diligence, or to slacken your hands in your work; but on the contrary, let it encourage, excite and assist you to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.*

S E R M O N V.

JACOB wrestling with the ANGEL,
obtains the Blessing.

GEN. xxxii. 26. *And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou blest me.*

HOW mean are the exploits, how contemptible are the encounters of the most celebrated heroes, whom the world admires, in comparison with the mighty achievements of Faith. Natural courage and valour have gained a reputation to some, as if they only were the men, and valour had died with them. But when the sum of all is heard, it amounts to no more, but worm man striving with his fellow worm, for a thing of nought, and gaining a victory which can never be more glorious than their party and cause; the one a worm, the other a thing that is not. But behold an encounter of faith; worm Jacob wrestling with the mighty God, and that for the divine blessing; the party and the cause great, and the victory falling to the weak side. *And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh: and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou blest me.*

Jacob's life seems to be the most remarkable of any of the Patriarchs, for the vast variety of incidents that were in it: so that he spoke true, when he said unto Pharaoh, *Few and evil have the days of the years*

of

of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage, Gen xlvii. 9. There is, in his life, the most famous instance that is any where to be found, of peoples meeting with a train of the heaviest trials, when they are going in the very way that God commands them.

The Lord had said to Jacob, *Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee, Gen. xxxi. 3.* Here is both a command and a promise. But what a variety of trials did the good man meet with, while he went away, in obedience to the command, and in the faith of the promise?

One of these many trials was, that while he was left alone, there wrestled with him a man till the breaking of the day, and disjointed his thigh; *And he said, let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, &c.*

In these words, we have the beginning of the conference betwixt the combatants. And here you have, (1st.) What the man said that wrestled with Jacob, and (2^{dly}.) What Jacob said in answer thereto.

First, We must consider what the man said who wrestled with Jacob. *Let me go, for the day breaketh.* And here several things may be enquired into; particularly, 1st, Who he was that wrestled with Jacob? *Ans.* That it was one in the form of a man, all parties seem to agree: but then, who he was that assumed this form, there are different opinions among interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, with which I shall not take up your time. I am of opinion, that it was God that wrestled with him, having assumed the form and shape of a man for that purpose. And what

what satisfies me therein is, that Jacob not only solicits him for the blessing, but expressly calls him God, saying, *I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*, ver. 30. I suppose likewise, that it was the second person, God the Son, who wrestled with him in the assumed form: for the Prophet Hosea, speaking of Jacob, says, *He had power over the angel and prevailed*, Hof. xii. 4. This is one of the titles of the Messiah. He is called the *messenger* of the covenant, or the *angel* of the covenant, Mal. iii. 1. It is the same word in both.

Besides, from what Christ himself saith, Joh. i. 18. It seems to follow, that all the appearances of God to the Old Testament saints, in which he assumed the figure and affections of a man, were not the appearances of God the Father, whom no man hath seen at any time, but the appearances of God the Son, as a prelude or introduction to his assuming our nature in his incarnation.

In these appearances he put on our nature, as it were, to try how it would suit him, and quickly put it off again, In his incarnation he put it on, so as never to put it off any more.

2dly, What sort of wrestling was it? and how could worm Jacob prevail over an uncreated angel?

Some make it visional, and in a dream; others, spiritual, consisting in the vigorous efforts of faith to hang by the word of promise, which Jacob had got, together with the command to return into his own country. But that it was real, and not visional, and that it was corporal, and not spiritual only, appears from the effects of it; for the angel *touched the hollow of his thigh, and put it out of joint*.

But

But it seems more unaccountable how Jacob had strength, so as to prevail over the angel. The created angels are said to excel in strength. One of them, we are told, smote in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred fourscore and five thousand men. What an unequal match, then, would Jacob, a single man, have been to one of the created angels! yet he prevails over the uncreated angel. This is strange! but the Prophet Hosea accounts for it, saying of Jacob, *by his strength he prevailed with God*, i. e. by God's strength, which was secretly communicate to Jacob, and became his by the justest title, being freely given him by God. Jacob, in wrestling, no doubt exerted all his strength; but God, in that body which he assumed, exerted only such a degree of strength as he knew Jacob would overcome.

We may (as * one observes) consider God here as bearing two persons; the one of a combatant with Jacob, and the other of an assistant to him; shewing in the last greater strength than in the first; fighting, as it were, against him with his left hand, and defending him with his right, and to that putting greater force. And in the mean time, we are not so much to look on Jacob's bodily strength, as his spiritual strength of the inward man.

3dly, Wherefore doth the angel say, *Let me go, for the day breaketh*? If it was an uncreated angel, what force was there in this argument to tell him, that the day breaketh? Surely day and night, light and darkness, all are alike unto God.

Ans. The Jewish doctors, who make the wrestler here

* Pococke's Commentary on Hosea, ch. xii. ver. 4. p. 643.
a created

a created angel, tell us, that the angels sing morning hymns before the throne of God: and therefore, when the day brake, the angel desired to be dismissed. But this is a fable. It may rather be said,

1st, That the uncreated angel speaks this after the manner of men, whose shape he had assumed, as if he hastened to be gone.

2^{dly}, The uncreated angel might speak this to put Jacob in mind of his affairs; that now, when the day was breaking, he should look after his wives, children and cattle, that they might not fall a prey to his enraged brother, and the four hundred men that were coming forth against him. Jacob had been absent from his family all the night, while he wrestled with the angel, and now, that day-light was coming in, it was proper for him to go and inquire into their welfare. Or,

3^{dly}, He might speak thus for Jacob's own sake, that he might not be overwhelmed with his glorious appearance, by coming in of the light. There was something of terror attended all the appearances of God in a visible shape to the Old Testament saints: therefore Jacob makes a world's wonder of it that he had seen God face to face, and got away with his life. When the angel of the Lord appeared unto Manoah's wife, Manoah said unto her, *We shall surely die, because we have seen God*, Judg. xiii. 32.

It was, perhaps, something of kindness to Jacob, that the angel wrestled with him in the night time, when the darkness would somewhat veil the lustre and glory of the angel's appearance, so that Jacob would be able to look upon him; and therefore, when the day breaks, the angel says, *Let me go*. But,

4^{thly}, He

4thly, He spoke this to try the faith and patience of Jacob, if he would part with him, or let him go without the blessing. Thus the Lord sometimes tries his people, by offering, as it were, to go away from them; not that he designs so to do, but that he may draw out the desires of their souls after him, and cause them cling to him with the greatest earnestness. God knew that Jacob would not let him go; but he spoke thus, that he might make Jacob's faith and patience conspicuous and famous through all ages.

Secondly, We come now to consider what Jacob said in answer to the angel desiring to be dismissed; *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*

Can a man (says one) hold God when he has a mind to be gone? No; but Jacob by this time knew his party, and perceived that he tried him if he would part without a blessing. Nay, says Jacob, if thou ask my leave and consent to part so, I will never give it: Let the day break, and the next night come, the great bleaser, and lame halting Jacob, shall never part, with Jacob's consent, without a blessing.

Here two things are observable, 1st, What it was that Jacob wanted, viz. the blessing. And, 2dly, His resoluteness and peremptoriness that he would have it. *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*

What the blessing was which he wanted, may be easily understood from the circumstances he was in at that time. He was now greatly distressed and alarmed, upon the report of his enraged brother his coming against him with four hundred armed men, to revenge, as he thought, an old quarrel he had with him. What shall he do in these circumstances? He dares not engage his brother with a few servants, the

women and the young children, that were scarce able to flee: But if the Lord would give him his blessing he is not afraid to meet with his brother. This would make him safe and easy, and nothing but this would do it.

He wanted, at this time, to have the old blessing he had got from his father ratified and confirmed, which his brother had despised: And then he wanted a new blessing, suited to his present circumstances, viz. That the Lord would either enable him to encounter the rage of his brother, or that he would turn the heart of his brother towards him. And behold how it turns out! when the two brothers met, instead of threatnings, blood and slaughter, there is nothing but mutual embraces, careffes, and exchange of compliments.

Let the spiritual feed of Jacob wrestle with the Lord, as he did for the blessing, and they shall obtain the heritage of Jacob their father.

In discoursing farther upon these words, I will,

1. Shew how God blesses his people.
2. What is implied in this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul.
3. That this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul, is the only way to obtain the blessing.

And *Lastly*, Apply.

1st, It is proposed to shew how the Lord blesses his people.

And here I might take notice, that there are three sorts of blessings mentioned in Scripture. 1. *Paternal blessings*. Those, among men who first took upon them to bless others, were in the relation of fathers, and those whom they blessed were their children.

dren. Thus Isaac blessed Jacob his son, Gen. xxvii. 27. And Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph in a very solemn manner, Gen. xlviii. 15, 16. And when he was lying an old man, upon a death bed, he gathered all his sons before him, and blessed them, each according to his blessing. Now, these blessings were sometimes prophetic and extraordinary, declaring what should be the fate of their posterity: sometimes they were common and ordinary, expressing the piety of the parents, and their good wishes for their children.

2. *Sacerdotal or ministerial blessings.* It was the office of the priests under the law, not only to offer up sacrifices for the people, but likewise to bless them in the name of the Lord; and this they did, not by a mere wishing blessings unto them, but by an office-power and authority granted them for that effect. The form of the blessing, as God delivered it to Moses, and he unto Aaron, is recorded, Numb. vi. 23. and downwards. *On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee.* This was the Old Testament blessing.

3. *Charitative blessings,* Psal. cxxix. ult. Men pronounced these blessings, not as in the relation of fathers, nor as in the office of priests or prophets; but all the Jews were to bless one another in the same manner. And after this manner should Christians bless one another. They should wish and pray each for the good of another. *Bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not,* Rom. xii. 14. Howbeit, this gives no countenance to the common, careless way of saying to your neighbour or friend, *God bless you, God be*

with you. This is often in the mouths of those who have no regard either for God or his blessing. But tender and serious persons, who know the weight of the curse, and the worth of the blessing, will endeavour to be religiously disposed in asking the blessing, either for themselves or others.

Thus you see how men bless, even good men; but the good God blesses after another way and manner.

1. God blesses in his own name. The patriarchs blessed their children, the priests the congregation, and the people one another, not in their own names, but in the name and by the authority of another, viz. the great God. But God blesses in his own name, and by his own underived authority. Thus we find both the oath and the blessing joined in the promise made to Abraham, Gen. xxii. 17. *In blessing I will bless thee.* Here God speaks like himself, and as never man spoke. Men bless others in the second person, as, *Blessed be thou of the Lord*: or in the third person, *The Lord bless thee and keep thee*; but God blesses in the first person, saying, *I will bless thee.*

2. God blesses *efficiently*. Those whom he blesses are blessed indeed; he actually makes them blessed. Men may bless ministerially; people may wish and pray for a blessing upon another; but it is the prerogative royal of the ever blessed God to command the blessing, as the Holy Ghost very emphatically expresses it, Lev. xxv. 21. Hence we learn, what a silly and empty compliment it was which Balak gave Balaam when he would have him to curse Israel, *I wot*, says he, *that he whom thou blessest is blessed*, Numb. xxii. 6. The prophane prince had great expectations

peccations from the prophane prophet; but they were vain and and ridiculous: for those whom God blesses shall be blessed; and if man should curse them, our God can turn their curse into a blessing, Neh. xiii. 2.

3. God blesses *spiritually*. So speaks the Apostle, Eph. i. 3. He communicates himself, and makes over himself unto his people. And he is the great spiritual and eternal good, Jehovah all-sufficient. He gives them his Christ, whom he promised to the church of old, as the greatest blessing; and in him they have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; so that they are compleat in him. He gives them his Spirit to abide in them and with them for ever, as their counsellor, their remembrancer, their guide, and comforter in every event; and, together with him, they have all his graces, his faith, his love, his peace, and his joy; and then they get the eternal inheritance, the crown of glory.

But who can reckon them up? who can make a full inventory of all the spiritual blessings conferred upon the people of God? We may as soon count the stars in the heavens, or the sand on the sea shore.

4. God blesses *universally*. Not that he blesses every individual; for shoals of the sons of men lie under the curse. But whomsoever he blesses, they abound with blessings. As the curse is manifold, so is the blessing; and for every curse that is upon the wicked, there is a double blessing upon the righteous, as we see in Deut. xxviii. 3, 4, 5, 6. compared with 16, 17, 18, 19.

He blesses their persons. Blessings are upon the head of the just, says Solomon, Prov. x. 6. Blessings and curses are said, in Scripture, to fall on mens heads

heads, *i. e.* on their persons, the head being put figuratively for the whole man. Now God blesses their persons, by putting them into a blessed state, reconciling them to himself, and renewing them after his image.

He blesses their sacrifices, prayers, and praises, by delighting in them, accepting of them, and sending them an answer of peace, Prov. xv. 8.

He blesses their substance, Deut. xxviii. 3. and downwards. Oftentimes it is very small: but a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked, Psal. xxxvii. 16. And this was said by one who had not the temptation to despise riches, because he wanted them, for he was a king. And oh, my brethren, how wonderful is the effect of this blessing! it multiplies the righteous man's little like the widow's oil, while the curse consumes and wastes the revenues of the wicked like a moth, and melts them down like snow before the sun.

The righteous man, having a divine blessing upon his small pittance, has peace and contentment in his own mind, and sometimes can do much good to others by it; while the wicked man, with all his riches, is obliged to borrow, and what is worse, cannot pay again. It is an observation of the wise man, *There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth, and yet it tendeth to poverty.*

He blesses their seed, Psal. xxxvii. 26. Isa. xlv. 3. As it goes ill with them that are left in the tabernacle of the wicked, so it goes well with them that are left in the tabernacle of the righteous.

God remembers his covenant with their fathers; so that the seed of the godly have this argument, among others,

others, to urge for the blessing, that the Lord blessed their fathers.

He blesses their *habitation*, Prov. iii. 33. Houses are blessed, not according to their goodness or badness, but according to the state of the inhabitants before the Lord. The curse of the Lord enters into the most stately dwellings; but his blessing rests in the meanest cottage of the righteous. He blesses the house for the sake of the inhabitants, and he blesses the inhabitants for the sake of Christ.

He blesses all the ordinances of the gospel to them, the word, sacraments and prayer. He teacheth them to profit, and to sow beside all waters; so that like the bee, they suck honey out of every flower, while the wicked, like the wasp, suck poison out of every thing, Tit. i. 15.

He blesses all providences to them, whether prosperous or adverse, Rom. viii. 28.

5. God blesses *eternally* and *unchangeably*. His blessing is like his calling, without repentance, Rom. xi. 29. As Isaac would not reverse the blessing of Jacob, for all the cries, and tears, and entreaties of Esau, so neither will God reverse the blessing of the righteous. Though Satan, the accuser of the brethren, bring against them many accusations, though their own consciences condemn them, though they fall into many transgressions which might justly forfeit the blessing, yet their God changeth not; but saith of them, as Isaac of Jacob, *I have blessed them, yea, and they shall be blessed*; blessed here, blessed hereafter, and blessed through all the days of eternity.

Lastly, God blesses *in Christ*. So speaks Paul, Eph. i. 3. God blesses his people, first, as the God and
Father

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then, as the Father in and through him. As Jacob obtained the blessing in his brother's garments, so we must be clothed with the righteousness of Christ, which is the fine linen of the saints, and the garment of our elder brother, in order to obtain the blessing of our heavenly Father.

Secondly, I shall now shew what is implied in this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul; *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* As if he had said, I am peremptorily and firmly resolved not to part with thee except thou bless me.

1st, It speaks felt need of the blessing. It was this that made the prodigal first think of returning to his father's house, Luk. xv. 17. *And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger; I will arise and go to my father.* My brethren, what is the reason, that the multitude lying under the curse, instead of holding God for the blessing, as Jacob did, will not so much as come near him for it? how is it, that, instead of saying unto God with the holy patriarch, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*, they say unto him, with those in Job xxi. 14. *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowlege of thy ways?* what is the reason hereof? It is plainly this; they have never to this day been duly sensible, what a weighty, wasting and consuming thing the curse is, under which they lie, therefore they find no need of the blessing.

The everlasting curse of the Lord, or his everlasting blessing, will be the portion of every soul among us. There is no middle, no third thing to cast the balance

balance one of the ways, but one of the two must inevitably be our portion; and what an amazing difference is there betwixt the two? The one is all happiness, the other all misery; the one is heaven in all its glory, the other is hell and all its horror. And yet the multitude of mankind live as if they were quite indifferent which of the two fell to their share in the end. But when the Spirit of the Lord touches the sinner's heart in a powerful manner, as he did the prodigal and the jailor, then the man is convinced, that the blessing is indispensibly necessary, and that he cannot be happy without it. Hence follow,

2. Vigorous desires and outgoings of the whole soul after the blessing, and the author of it. Formerly the desires of the soul were like so many streams in rivulets, one running this way, and another running that way; but now they are like one great river running with a continued course unto the ocean; all the scattered desires, affections and appetites, are contracted into, and united in this one point, even the blessing of the covenant, purchased by the Redeemer's blood, which only maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow.

In this case, the soul thinks within itself, and says to itself, "O how happy would I be with this blessing! Would he command his favour and loving-kindness to rest and remain with me, I should be little solicitous about any thing else; I should have an abundant balance and compensation for all the crosses, losses and disappointments I might meet with in an evil world: for his loving-kindness is better than life, and all the comforts and enjoyments of it. Let the carnal noisy world be sending up that unhallowed cry

to heaven, *Who will shew us any good?* It is, and ever shall be the desire of my soul, that the Lord would bless me indeed, and lift up his countenance upon me, and I shall have a far more solid joy and gladness than the men of the world have in the midst of their abundance," Psal. iv. 6, 7.

3. Frequent and fervent addresses to the throne of grace for the blessing. In this way Jacob obtained it: he wept and made supplication to the angel, and so prevailed, as the prophet informs us, Hos. xi. 4. From this patriarch's story, it appears, that he was a man abundantly brave and courageous; and it is no impeachment of it, that he burst into tears when he was supplicating the blessing. This showed the tenderness and piety of his soul; all which are very consistent with true honour and bravery. Who doubts of David's bravery? Yet, when wrestling with God for his blessing, he could weep so plentifully, as to water his couch, and make his bed to swim. But why do I speak of men? did not the Lion of the tribe of Judah, in the days of his flesh, offer up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, Heb. v. 7.

When the Spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon a person or people, they are enabled, with holy Hannah to pour out their soul before the Lord. The spirit (as Paul says) maketh intercession for them with groanings that cannot be uttered, Rom. viii. 26. Not that the holy Spirit groans, but he makes the saints to emit such groans and sighs, as the Lord very well understands, though they be not able to speak or utter the case in words before him. At other times, he allows them great freedom and liberty of speech in pleading for the blessing. He fills
their

their mouths with arguments, and such arguments as no natural invention or gift could suggest. It would quite surprise any body that is unacquainted with the spirit of prayer, to hear what powerful rhetoric will flow from those who have otherwise very mean talents, when they are helped with the Spirit to wrestle in prayer for the blessing.

They will plead upon his name as Joshua did; *What wilt thou do unto thy great name?* They will plead upon his word; *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope,* Psal. cxix. 49. They will bring in all his attributes; *Is his mercy clean gone?* Upon his faithfulness; *Doth his promise fail for evermore?* Psal. lxxvii. 8. They will plead upon his relations; *Is he a father, and will he suffer his children to starve?* or when they ask bread, will he give them a stone? is he a husband, and will he be regardless of his spouse?

Moses was such a powerful pleader with God for others, as well as himself, that the Lord speaks as if his hands were holden by him; *Let me alone,* (says God) *that my wrath may wax hot against this people.*

4. A close and resolute holding by the word of promise, like holy Job, who says, *Though he should slay me yet will I trust in him,* Job xiii. 15. We speak of holding a man by his word; and indeed, if he is an upright and honest man, it is the strongest hold you can have of him, and the best security. Now, God is faithful who hath promised; he is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent. There is not a man upon earth, nor a devil in hell, that shall ever be able to say,

“ Here is a word of God that he never made good.” Which of you convinceth him of unfaithfulness to his promise. Since, then, he has promised the blessing, and exhibited it to you in the gospel, let faith grip resolutely to the promise; and in so doing, you will get hold of the great Promiser, who will not refuse to be held by his own promise till he make it good.

5. The diligent use of all means which God has appointed for obtaining the blessing. Jacob wrestles for the blessing; he prays for it; he weeps for it; and at length he obtains it. The spouse, Cant. iii. 1. sought Christ by night on her bed, and found him not. But did she desist, as if better could not be made of it? By no means: she says, *I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways; I will seek him whom my soul loveth*: and at last she found him.

They that seek the blessing must not lye down or sit still, waiting when it should fall into their lap; but they must up and be doing. They must address God through Christ, by the Spirit; *For the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*. They must peruse the word of God, the blessed Bible, the great charter of their salvation sealed by the blood of their Saviour. They must wait on the preaching of the word, and the dispensing of the sacraments, particularly the sacrament of the supper, forasmuch as the Lord hath frequently made himself known to his people in the breaking of bread.

Lastly, Repeated disappointments and discouragements must not cause them to give over, but they must peremptorily and resolutely hang on about the Lord's hand, until they obtain the blessing. Jacob,
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in wrestling with the angel, gets the hollow of his thigh put out of joint, so that he went halting. And now, we would think Jacob had got enough of it; he had wrestled his bones out of joint, and it is high time to yield to his antagonist. But it is quite otherwise; this discouraging event quickened the desires of the holy man for the blessing instead of blunting them; and therefore he stiffly holds his party, and tells him peremptorily, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*

The spouse sought Christ upon her bed; but she does not find him there. Then she goes about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways; but cannot find him there neither. Then she goes to the watchmen, and says, *Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?* They, it seems, could not satisfy her neither. But she still goes on in spite of all these disappointments. And behold, the unwearied diligence and courage of faith prevails at last, Cant. iii. 1. and downwards.

How many repulses and discouragements did the woman of Canaan meet with in seeking the blessing; but she continued her importunity, and prevailed at last. When the messenger of Satan was sent to buffet Paul, Paul tells us, that for this thing he besought the Lord thrice. Perhaps the first and second time he besought the Lord, the Lord gave him no answer. But he continued his addresses, and at length this encouraging sentence came forth from the divine presence, *My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in your weakness.*

III. I proceed, in the *third* place, to shew, that
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this holy resoluteness and peremptoriness of soul is the only way to obtain the blessing.

1. It is the footsteps of the flock. We have several precedents and examples hereof in scripture. That in the text is one; the spouse, Cant. iii. 1. is another. But the most famous example hereof, perhaps in the whole Bible, is the woman of Canaan, Mat. xv. She comes to Christ, and cries, *O Lord, thou Son of David, have mercy on me, for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.* But she meets with great discouragement; Christ takes no notice of her; *he answered not a word.* Then it seems she addressed his disciples, and she meets with a second repulse; for they besought their master, *saying, send her away, for she crieth after us.* This is a clamorous and noisy woman, pray dismiss her, set her off. But she still insists, and Christ speaks; but behold the speech is more discouraging than his former silence; for he seems to cast her out of his commission, by telling her, that *he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;* whereas she was of the accursed race of the Canaanites. But she is resolved not to quit it so yet. The devil was in her house, the devil was in her daughter, and she cannot think to go back and fight with him again: therefore she comes and worships him, saying, *Lord, help me.* And behold she meets with a fourth repulse; for he calls her by the reproachful name of a dog. *It is not meet to take the childrens bread and cast it to dogs.* Truth Lord, (says she) *but the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.* Naaman the Syrian was such a dog as I, yet he obtained the blessing; Rahab the harlot was such a dog as I, yet she obtained the blessing; and why may not I obtain

I obtain it also. Our Lord carries the trial no further, but grants her request; professing his admiration of her faith; *O woman great is thy faith.*

2. For confirmation hereof, we may consider the overflowing goodness and benignity of the divine nature, Luk. xviii. 7, 8. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them. I tell you he will avenge them speedily.

If it is natural for parents to love their children, and to assist them to the utmost of their power, how much more will our heavenly father hear the cries of his children, and give them what they ask. To this purpose our Lord says, *If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?* Luk. xi. 13. Now, the comparison here is not betwixt the gifts which earthly parents give their children, and those which our heavenly Father gives unto his children; but the comparison is instituted betwixt the kindness and good will of the givers towards their respective children. All that love and affection which is naturally in parents towards their children, is implanted in them by God; and therefore it must be in a far more eminent manner in God towards those that are his children. *He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?* He that put all the affection and love in fathers towards their children, shall he not love his children? In fine, what Christ intends is plainly this, that the most tender and affectionate parents on earth, never gave any thing to their dearest children with so much heart, love and kindness,

kindness, as God gives the blessing, even life for evermore, to his children.

3. The Lord allows his people to use this holy importunity and resoluteness with him for the blessing; and therefore, that method shall certainly prevail.

This appears in the parable of him who came at midnight to borrow three loaves from his friend, for the use of a friend that came to visit him, Luk. xi. 8. *I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.*

The design of this parable is, plainly, to encourage Christians in a holy importunity and resoluteness in asking and hanging about a throne of grace. So our Lord applies it: *And I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you: seek and ye shall find: knock and it shall be opened, For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* Observe the gradation here. First, ask, and if he that does not succeed, seek, which implies more pains and diligence. And if you cannot prevail by seeking, then knock, which implies still greater vigour and resoluteness.

From the parable itself, we may observe, to our present purpose, 1. That God's people may come to him at any time, though it were at midnight. 2. That he allows them to ask very largely, three loaves, when perhaps fewer might have served. 3. That they may borrow of him without speaking a word of paying again. 4. Faith is not ashamed to tell the soul's straitened condition to the Lord. I have nothing to set before him.

USE. Let me exhort you to imitate the famous example in the text. Be earnest and importunate for the blessing; go to the Angel of the covenant for it, and put on a holy peremptoriness not to go without it.

1. Without the blessing ye lie under the curse, which is a wasting, weakening, and consuming thing. *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them, Gal. iii. 20.* Your persons are cursed. The soul, with all its powers and faculties, and the body, with all its members, lye under the dead weight of this curse, and how can they prosper. It is impossible for the soul to prosper in that case: and if the body be in health, it is but as the ox, fed for the slaughter. Your substance is cursed; there is a curse on all ye possess and enjoy. Your plowing, sowing, reaping, &c. are cursed. Your table is cursed; the meat and drink ye take are cursed for your sakes. All your duties are cursed; your praying, reading, &c. are all put in the roll of sins. Oh, then, be convinced of the necessity of the New Covenant blessing to remove the curse, and to entitle you to eternal life.

2. Consider the extent of the blessing. It will reach to your persons, your souls, and your bodies; to your substance, your seed; to your sacred services, and to every thing of yours. Surely, then, blessed is the person, and blessed are the people whom God bleffeth. What was very prophanelly said by Balak to Balaam, may be very justly and very devoutly said unto God, namely, *I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed, Num. xxii. 6.*

3. God is willing to bless you all in Christ Jesus,

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Unto you first God having raised up his Son Jesus Christ, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities, Acts iii. ult. The blessing is purchased at the expence of Christ's blood; ye cannot buy it, but ye may beg it earnestly, and receive it humbly, by the hand of faith. Know then, that this day, the blessing and the curse, life and death, are set before you.

And now, as for you that are the spiritual seed of Jacob, believers in Christ, I would have you to seek more of his spirit and temper, and ye shall be fed with the heritage of Jacob your father, as the Prophet speaks, Isa. lviii. 14.

When ye have any particular suit at a throne of grace, any special blessing in view, do not limit the Lord to your times and seasons; neither faint and give over; but wrestle with him, and wait on him continually, and ye shall obtain it. For this purpose consider,

1. How the great ones of the world expect to be waited on by those who have any request to ask of them.

2. He is a God of judgment, and knows the times and the seasons both for giving and withholding.

3. Blessings long waited for and expected, have so much the greater sweetness about them, when at last we obtain them.

S E R M O N VI.

The great Advantage of Afflictions to
the People of G O D.

GEN. xlii. 36. *And Jacob their Father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not; and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.*

IT is amazing to think of the divine condescension, in establishing such a close connexion betwixt his own glory and the good of his people. The right improvement of this consideration, is enough to quiet the mind of a Christian, under the most dark and perplexing event of Providence that can befall him. What greater security would we have, that all things shall work together for our good, than this, that our good is in a close connexion with the divine glory: yet how ready are we to put asunder what God hath joined. The Christian, in the hastiness of his spirit, occasioned by a multiplicity of sore trials, is apt to say with Jacob, *all these things are against me*: whereas, the promise says, that all these things shall work together for his good.

In this chapter we are told, that Jacob's sons were sent down to Egypt to buy corn, because of the famine in their own land. Joseph, their brother, whom they had sold, was now governor of all the land of Egypt; and it was he who sold to all the people of

the land. He knew his brethren when they came to him, though they did not know him. He dealt severely with them at the first, which brought their old guilt to their remembrance. He threatens them as spies; puts them all in prison for three days; takes Simeon and binds him before their eyes, to keep him until they should return; and orders them to bring their youngest brother Benjamin along with them, the favourite son, whom the father would not send with his brethren at first, lest peradventure some mischief should befall him.

When they came home and told all this unto their father, the good old man, in a fit of strong grief, cries out, *Me have ye bereaved of my children.* It is a supplement, but a natural one, as appears from what follows; ye have bereaved me, or robbed me. They had sold Joseph into the hands of the Ishmaelitish merchants, though their father knew it not, but imagined that he was destroyed by wild beasts; and this deed of theirs gave rise to what befel the other two, to wit, the binding of Simeon, and the demanding of Benjamin: so that they were justly chargeable with robbing the old man of his sons. New trials brings old ones of the same kind fresh to remembrance.

Simeon's and Benjamin's fate puts Jacob in mind of his son Joseph; and so he makes an enumeration of some heavy trials with respect to him. *Joseph is not.* He reckoned that he was dead long ago. Simeon is not; he was bound by the governor of the land of Egypt, and he gave him up for dead also. And as for Benjamin, whom they wanted to take along with them, it is likely, he thought, that if he went once away, he would never see him more: so that here

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was a train of sore trials; and the old man, under the weight of them, cries out, *all these things are against me*; or, as it is in the original, *upon me*: that is, they are extremely heavy upon me, insomuch that they cannot be borne; they will sink me even to the grave. Yet in all this God had a kind design towards Jacob and his family. He was to bring much good to him out of these sore trials; but he, in the excess of his grief, could not see how this breach upon breach, made upon his family, could tend to his and their advantage; and therefore he says, *all these things are against me*.

The observation from the words is, whatever discouraging thoughts the Christian may have under the trials of life, yet it is most certain, that not one of them are against him, but all of them for his good. This observation I propose to illustrate.

First, They are, by divine appointment, subservient to the great work of sanctification in him. The Apostle, speaking of our earthly parents, says, *They, verily, for a few days, chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness*. Parents chastise their children after their own pleasure, which is often not well regulated; yea, often they chastise, rather for gratifying their own passion than profiting their children: But our heavenly Father chastises his children always for their profit. And if it be asked, where is the profit they get by it? The answer is, they are made partakers of their Father's holiness, and that is the greatest gain.

Afflictions are his lance, whereby he lets out the humours. They are the furnace into which he casts the
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the vessels of mercy, not to destroy them, but to prepare them unto glory. He sits as a skilful refiner watching over his metal, that nothing be lost but the dross; and he brings it at length out of the furnace, shining and pure as gold. Now, my bretheren, sanctification is a thing absolutely necessary to us; *for without holiness no man shall see the Lord*: and then, it is the top of the desires of the saints. If there is any one thing which they wish for above another, it is, that they may be made partakers of his holiness. And if this be so, then, certainly, that which is a mean of advancing holiness in them, must needs be profitable unto them. But afflictions are one of these means; and therefore the Christian must not say with Jacob, *all these things are against me*. True, indeed, some carry a cross who are not following after Jesus. Many are under great afflictions, and, at the same time, in the gall of bitterness. But you must consider, that the good effect of afflictions is by the appointment of God: therefore, when the chosen of God are called to take up the cross, this divine appointment will be upon it; and so sanctification will flow from it. The crabbed tree of the cross, by the kindly influence of the Holy Ghost, brings forth fruits of righteousness, to the praise and glory of God. Hence the righteous are said to flourish like the palm-tree, which grows the more that it is pressed down.

Secondly, The difficulties occurring in the Christian's life are not against him, but for his good; because by them he is conformed unto Jesus Christ his head; of whom we have, among others, this surprising account, *that he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. How strong and nervous are the expressions.

expressions. A man of sorrows is more than a sorrowful man: It is a man, as it were, made up of sorrows. Now, as conformity to Christ is the indispensable duty of the saints, so it is their interest; and, at the same time, the greatest piece of honour that can be conferred upon them, Rom. viii. 29. However, let it be observed, that conformity to Christ lyes not in mere suffering. It is not in our being afflicted, but in our bearing afflictions in a Christian manner, that makes us conformed to Jesus Christ. Hence the Apostle says, *Behold we count them happy which endure*; that is, which hold out with patience, resignation and resolution, still persevering in the exercise of grace, and in the practice of duty. There was a peculiar temper and disposition of mind appeared in Christ, through the whole scene of his suffering; and the more or less of that temper that the Christian discovers, under his trials, just so much the more or less is he conformed unto Jesus. When he left the world, as the Apostles succeeded him in preaching the gospel, so they succeeded in suffering for the sake of it; and under their sufferings they gave the world a very bright representation of their master's temper. And truly, the first man that died in defence of christianity, I mean Stephen, seems to be as much moulded into the spirit of his master as any man could be. He left the world with a meekness and patience, and good will towards men, and even his enemies, much like to what the Redeemer discovered upon his leaving the world. The one said, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. The other, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*.

Thirdly, The afflictions occurring in the life of a Christian

Christian are for his advantage, because by them his graces are exercised and manifested. The stubbornness and rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness, exercised and displayed the meekness of Moses. Neither had we heard so much of the patience of Job, if he had not laboured under a variety of the forest calamities. The afflictions of good men not only discover the habit of grace in them, or show them to be gracious, but the graces which they have are brought forth into action. The rust and dimness which they contracted in time of peace, is rubbed off in the time of affliction, and they shine illustrious as arms in the day of battle. It is an honour to be called forth from the croud, and made an object of admiration to angels, to the world, and to men. These blessed spirits above, behold with joy and admiration the faith, the hope, the patience, the meekness, and the resignation of the saints on earth under their trials. It is an honour to be called to give evidence of the power of the grace of God, and of the reality that is in the religion of Christ. There are many, whose names send forth a savoury perfume in the churches of Christ to this very day, who would have long since sunk in oblivion, had it not been for some eminent trials wherewith they were exercised, and under which they eminently displayed the grace of God in them.

Fourthly, Whatever dismal apprehensions the Christian may have of the troubles in his life, they are for his good; because, often, they are the means of preventing much sin, that otherwise would be committed. It is oftentimes a mercy to the Lord's people, that their way is hedged up with thorns, otherwise they would break over and tread upon

upon forbidden ground, Hof. ii. 6. and that there is a wall reared up, so that they cannot find their paths. When the Lord sends a cross to meet them, as he did Abigail to meet David, they may say with him, *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me.* That meeting, you know, prevented much bloodshed and mischief, which David, in his wrath, designed against Nabal and his family. Thus, I say, the Lord makes the afflictions of his children serve to restrain corruption in them, which would otherwise break forth. One is in poverty and straits: The Lord, by these, prevents pride, oppression, and trusting in uncertain riches, which, perhaps, the Christian would have fallen into, if his circumstances had been better. Another complains of the loss of children, or other dear and useful relations, and says with Jacob, *all these things are against me.* Why, it is likely, if these earthly comforts had been continued, they would have usurped God's room in the believer's heart; and if so great an evil was prevented by removing them, then, certainly, their death was for our good.

Fifthly, Trials in the life of the child of God are for his profit, because they crucify him unto the world, and all things therein. It is said of the Hebrews, that they *endured a great fight of affliction, and took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance:* Sanctified afflictions indeed! The people of God, as well as others, are too much inclined to take up their resting place on this side Jordan. They would fain settle in the wilderness, in some fits at least, without fighting their way through

to the heavenly Canaan : therefore God makes thorns and briers to spring up in all those places they choose to rest in, that so they may arise and depart, saying, surely this is not our rest, because it is polluted. We are apt not only to groan, but to continue big with expectations from the creature, in the midst of repeated disappointments. We are still for hewing out the other cistern, and smiting the other rock, though the cistern holds no water, and though the rock flashes fire in our face, and burns it, instead of yielding water for our refreshment.

Now, as this earthly disposition is dishonouring to God, and prejudicial to the saints, so God makes use of afflictions to be the death of it. He exercises his people with sore trials, perhaps both within and without, and continues them, so that they go all their days in the bitterness of their souls, and never eat their bread with pleasure. He suffers them to meet with one disappointment upon the back of another; so that they are at length, in a great measure, deadened to the world. Their expectations and affections are carried off it, and raised to heaven, to the more substantial and durable things within the vail. They look upon it as a crucified thing, as a flower which the spirit of God has blown upon and blasted; and so they leave it in their affections and pursuits. They turn their backs upon it, and their faces are as though they would go up to Jerusalem. Now, certainly, that which produces such a notable effect as this, is good; and therefore, instead of saying with Jacob, *all these things are against me*, the followers of the Lamb ought to say with David, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.*

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In the *sixth* place, The afflictions in the life of a believer are not against him, but for him, whatever he may apprehend; inasmuch as by these he gets a treasure of valuable experiences, Rom. v. 3, 4. Trials, especially if they be of any continuance, afford the children of God many experiences of his love, mercy, power and faithfulness. In his love, and in his pity, he has frequently relieved them when they were sore oppressed. In his faithfulness, he has brought about the accomplishment of promises that seemed to be forgotten. His powerful arm has, before their eyes, given things that seemed desperate and hopeless, a surprising turn to the advantage. Thus the saints have frequent opportunities of observing how good and gracious the Lord is; and by these they come to a better understanding of his methods of providence, both towards the world in general, and towards particular persons, which seem strange unto such as never have observed them in their own case.

Moreover, in a long series of trials, they get many experiences of their own deceitful hearts, and though these be painful unto them, yet they are very profitable; for thus they learn when and where to be most upon their guard; and thus they are not in such danger, as those who know the deceitfulness of their heart only by speculation or report.

Again, Christians, in long afflictions, become acquainted with the power and craft of the grand adversary. Hence they are said *not to be ignorant of his devices*. He is ready with his temptations at all times. In times of affliction he seeks to winnow: he is sure to come when the corn is under the flail. It is profitable to reflect on these experiences: by them

the heart is filled with gratitude, and the Christian furnished with new matter for songs of praise.

Seventhly, The troubles of Christians are much to their advantage, because they tend to excite longing desires to be freed from the body of sin, and be ever with the Lord, where holiness will be compleated as well as happiness. They remember, that being in an imperfect state, they cannot be excoemed from trouble. They are sensible, that the remainder of sin in them is the occasion of their being cast down, and made to ly as broken vessels among the pots; therefore they long for the approach of that day, when they shall be perfectly free of sin, and set down under the refreshing beams of the Sun of righteousness, that shall not be eclipsed through the long days of eternity.

In the *next* place, The afflictions of life do good to the Christian, by being the remembrancers of sin. As we are apt to forget God the law-giver, so we are very ready to forget our sins, that are the transgressions of that law. Now, afflictions readily bring them to remembrance, and that two ways, *1st*, In general. Were we not sinners, we would not be sufferers; for as sin brought death into the world, so it brought in afflictions, which are near a-kin to it: For whereas the former absolutely dissolves the frame of nature, so the other weakens and prepares it for dissolution. The effect naturally reminds us of the cause: so, when the Christian is under affliction, he is not only reminded of sin, but he may be led into such views of its nature, demerit, and consequences, as will be very profitable unto him. But, *2^{dly}*, They are not only remembrancers of sin in general, but they often bring some particular sins to the remembrance of the Christian.

rian. Thus it was with Joseph's brethren: the harsh treatment they met with in Egypt, brought their guilt concerning their brother fresh to their remembrance, Gen. xlii. 21. A guilty conscience is still jealous. An old sin, especially if it be of a hainous nature, often appears and haunts the sinner like a ghost, upon his meeting with new trials. The waves of guilt, and the waves of affliction meeting together, create a tempestuous sea in the soul. And if it be enquired how it is that afflictions bring particular sins to remembrance, I answer, in two things, *1st*, As God does not afflict willingly, or for nought, so it is natural for the Christian to enquire into the cause; and upon enquiry he will readily fix upon some particular sin or sins in his life, the guilt of which oppresses him most. *2^{dly}*, There is often such an affinity betwixt the affliction and the sin thereby brought to remembrance, as that the former appears evidently to be the chastisement of the latter, as we see in the case of Adoni-bezek, Judg. i. 7. Now, it is profitable to the Christian to have some particular sins brought to remembrance by affliction, though they be long since pardoned; for this causes him to repeat his esteem of the atonement made by Christ, to renew his repentance, to double his diligence, and to be more and more watchful.

Ninthly, The difficulties of the Christian are by no means against him, but much to his advantage, as they afford an opportunity of displaying unto him the glory of the divine attributes, which are especially concerned in supporting him under his afflictions, and delivering him from them at last. It was upon this account that the great apostle Paul gloried, and took pleasure

pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, and distresses. These things considered in themselves, could never be pleasant to any man; but considered as means of displaying the divine power, wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness; they are both pleasant and profitable to the real Christian.

How gloriously does God display his power in the afflictions of his people? how often is the strength of the strength of Israel made perfect in them? He giveth power to the faint, and unto them that have no might, he encreaseth strength, and enables them to bear such burdens, as makes them a wonder not only unto many, but even unto themselves. His power shines in restraining Satan, who seeks to winnow them; in restraining their own corruptions, which would lead them to murmur; and in restraining the power of the men of the world, who would oppress them.

How glorious an appearance does the wisdom of God make in the field of the Christian's afflictions? He shows himself a skilful physician in making up the medicines of his people. He knows our frame: he remembers we are but dust: he is well acquainted with the delicate constitution of the new creature in the Christian, and so he makes every dispensation issue in the strengthening of it. What a joyful prospect of the manifold wisdom of God might Jacob have, after he and his family were carried down to Egypt, when he saw his son Joseph not only alive, but living in honour next to the king. And the rejoicing views which Joseph himself had of the divine wisdom, throughout the whole scene, may be learned from what he says to his brethren, after his father's

ther's death, when they were afraid that he would avenge himself upon them.

The faithfulness of God is also displayed amidst the difficulties of a believer, as in the case of Abraham, the father of the faithful. After the promise was confirmed unto Isaac, that in him his seed should be called, the promise-maker commands him to do that which in all appearance would absolutely frustrate the promise. He commands Abraham, with his own hand, to slay his son, the son of the promise, and offer him up a sacrifice, which was as much as if he had bidden him kill the Messiah, and deprive the world of a Saviour: yet, out of that dark dispensation, there arose unto Abraham the greatest glory of the divine faithfulness that ever appeared, until the actual coming of the Messiah.

And as for the divine mercy: *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him*; so that, with the Psalmist, they may sing aloud of his mercy. Now every body must allow, that such manifestations of the divine perfections are very profitable to the Christian; and if so, he cannot in justice say, that afflictions, which are the occasions of them, are against him.

Tenthly, Afflictions are for the advantage of the children of God, because, under them, they are allowed sometimes more than ordinary communion with God. I do not say that this is the Christian's ordinary allowance: nay, sometimes the want of this is his greatest trial. But sometimes the Lord causes light to arise in the midst of darkness: he communicates unto them such degrees of light, life and comfort, that their inward man has been revived, renewed, and refreshed

freshed to a wonder. Thus it was with holy Jacob when he had wrestled all the night with the angel, even to the disjoining of his thigh. He gave the place a new name, calling it Penuel, *for, says he, I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.* This, you know, was at a time when the patriarch was in great fear that his brother Esau would make an attack upon him, and smite him, as he expresses it, and the mother with the children. The Psalmist also gives testimony to this, when he says, *In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.* And thus has it been with many of the Lord's people; he has made all their bed in their sickness, so that it has been soft, and sweet, and easy unto them. They have felt his left hand under their head, and his right hand embracing them. They have got such manifestations of his love, his grace, his glory, and such clear evidences of their special interest in his favour, that they have been made to say with David, *It was good for me that I was afflicted.*

But, further, the trials of the children of God are greatly for their profit, as they are the means of making them walk more closely and humbly with God all their days. Thus good king Hezekiah, when he was recovered out of that sickness which was likely to be unto death, resolved to give glory to God, by walking softly all the remainder of his days. David, in his prosperity, said, *I shall never be moved;* and it was very foolishly said. But in the day of adversity he considered better, and learned to know in whom his standing was. Sanctified afflictions make a strong believer. Job winds up his case unto a supposition of being killed out-right, and even then he resolves to cleave

cleave unto the Lord. And as they make a strong, so they make a humble and self-denied believer. The Lord schooled Job until he made him vile in his own eyes. Nay, my brethren, take for confirmation of what I say, the great example of the Son of God. Who among the saints, who among the sons of men, had difficulties, trials and afflictions, any way equal to his? yet never was faith carried so high, nor humility so deep, as in him. His faith conflicted with the pain, the shame, the ignominy of the cross; yea, which was worse than any or all of these, with the wrath and desertion of his holy Father, and yet was victorious over them all.

In the *last* place, The difficulties which occur in the life of the Christian in this world, are much to his advantage; for they will make the rest above more sweet and refreshing unto him. There will certainly be a sweetness and refreshment in the heaven of afflicted believers, that would not have been in the heaven of Adam, supposing him to have stood in innocence. Meat has a peculiar relish to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty. Rest is not so refreshing to any as to the labouring man. And doubtless, the heaven of rest on the other side Jordan, will be the more acceptable unto the saints, that they are for a season sore tossed on the tempestuous sea of life.

Before I proceed to the application, let me shortly enquire, Whence it is that Christians are so apt to mistake the designs of providence towards them, in the difficulties and trials which befall them on earth, saying with Jacob, as in my text, *all these things are against me.*

First, This proceeds from unbelief, which is a
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teeming womb of fears and jealousies of God. Tho' there is not in real saints an evil heart of unbelief, yet there is much unbelief in their hearts: and their unbelief is the most malignant member of the whole body of sin. It is a whisperer, that deals in separating chief friends. It casts mist and dust, and darkness upon the mind of the Christian, so that he cannot discern the kindness and good will of God often towards him, in the dispensations of his providence. The carriage of the Israelites in the wilderness, is a plain proof of the power of unbelief. Though they were guilty of many other sins, yet unbelief was the original of them all, and the procuring cause of their judgments. The Apostle expressly declares, they entered not into the earthly Canaan because of unbelief. They were never reduced to any straits, but they fell a murmuring against God, and against Moses. Their unbelief made them doubt about every thing. Hear their provoking questions; *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people?* Sinful and shameful questions! especially considering what proofs of the divine power they had gotten who proposed them. Take heed, then, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God: for if unbelief have the ascendant in the soul, and be allowed to judge in the conduct of providence, it will be sure to give in a verdict to the dishonour of God, and the discouragement of your souls.

Secondly, The people of God are apt to mistake the designs of providence towards them, from ignorance of his complex plan. *God's ways are in the seas;*

seas ; his paths in the deep waters ; and his footsteps are not known ; yet all his ways are perfect ; he is a God of truth, and without iniquity ; just and right is he. We see this and the other dispensation of providence as it falls out, and we judge of it by itself, without considering its connexion with the whole scheme. Take that dispensation, the selling of Joseph into the hands of the Ishmaelitish merchants by itself, and you cannot see how it could work either for his own good, or for the good of his father's family ; but take it in connexion with the other turns of providence in Joseph's history, and you will readily perceive, as Joseph owns, that God meant it for good.

There is a close connexion, a beautiful harmony, among all the dispensations of providence. God acts consistently with himself, and consistently with the good of his people ; and therefore, when there appears any inconsistency in his conduct to us, we should be sure to impute this to our own ignorance, and not unto him, who does all things well.

In the *last* place, Our mistaking the designs of God in adverse dispensations, is partly owing to a conviction of guilt. We are all sinful creatures. Fears and jealousies are the inseparable attendants of sin. Hence we take the alarm when we meet with cross events of providence, and are apt to imagine that a design for our hurt is laid against us. We are conscious to ourselves that we have offended God, and that we justly deserve his wrath, and so we are ready to suspect, that the cross dispensations which befall us, come as the punishment of a judge, and not as the chastisement of a father.

I pass on now to the Improvement.

First, From this doctrine we learn, that the men of the world have no reason to triumph over the saints of God in their calamities. David's enemies insulted over him in his distress, saying, *The Lord hath forsaken him; persecute and take him for there is none to deliver him.* So foolish are they, and unacquainted with the ways of God, that they take outward prosperity to be a badge of the special favour of heaven, and therefore they said to David, when matters went cross with him, *Where is thy God?* To which it may be answered, our God is in the heaven, in the earth, and every where, except in the hearts of those who propose such a question; and they shall find him there at last, if they amend not their ways.

Let not then the wicked triumph over the saints of the Most High, for he will never leave them, nor forsake them. Though he may suspend the sensible manifestations of his love for a season, yet the love itself changeth not, but, like God himself, is invariably the same. Though he may change the course of his providence towards them, as to outward things, they shall be made better, and not worse by the change.

Secondly, If all things issue in the good of the Christian, we infer, that all things must work for the ruin of the ungodly. In reference hereunto, we may observe what the Apostle says to Titus, *Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure.* The wicked are like filthy vessels, which defile every thing that is put into them. As a foul stomach turns the wholsomest food into noxious humours, so the best things which the wicked enjoy, are by themselves abused unto their ruin.

All the ordinances of the gospel work for their destruction. Christ himself is a stumbling block to them. His word is unto them the savour of death unto death. His ministers work upon them according to that commission, Isa. vi. 10. *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert and be healed.* Every step of providence towards them helps on their destruction. If they are in adversity, God is their adversary. If they pass under the rod, they are not within the bond of the covenant. If they are in prosperity, their table becomes a snare unto them. Their fellowship both with saints and sinners, is to their hurt. If their days upon earth are lengthened out, it is that they may fill up the measure of their iniquity.

Thirdly, From this doctrine we may learn the comfortable state of the true Christian in every situation. Let me here adopt a line out of Moses' farewell sermon, to the tribes and people of Israel. *Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency. All things shall work together for your good.* If you are in prosperity, ye shall not be destroyed by it like the foolish. If ye suffer affliction on your bodies, on your souls, on your good names, on your relations, or any thing else, be not afraid; say not with Jacob, *all these things are against me.* All is well with you, and shall be well. My brethren, here is soul quieting doctrine, under all the convulsions and commotions that are or may be in the world, or the church. Here is solid ground for absolute resignation

signation to the will of God in all the events of his providence. Choose not, therefore, for yourselves; but let God, as good reason is, choose for you, and rest quietly in the choice he makes. Resignation, under the most cross dispensations, would have been your indispensable duty, although God had not told you how much good he designs to you by them. Since, then, he has informed you of this, how inexcusable will ye be, if ye rebel? how aggravated will your murmuring be? O then be still, and know that he is God.

In the *last* place, This doctrine lays a foundation for rejoicing under the greatest tribulations. *Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice.* However singular the trials of believers are, with whatever heightening circumstances they are attended, why should ye be discouraged, after ye have heard from the mouth of the Lord, how much the worst of them are to your advantage: *Therefore lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees. Why lie ye thus upon your faces? up and be doing; the Lord is with you; the Lord is before you; the Lord is on every side.*

S E R M O N VII.

The Nature of and Obligations to Resignation to the Will of GOD.

2 S A M. xv. 26. *But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.*

IN the preceeding sermon you have heard, that all the tribulations of the people of God are for their good, and how they are so, whatever discouraging apprehensions they may have of them. If this be so, then, doubtless, it is their duty to be absolutely resigned unto the divine disposal in every thing. Of this we have a notable example in the words of our text. David is here in great distress, by means of his son's unnatural rebellion. He finds it necessary to fly from Jerusalem. The priests and Levites accompany him in his flight, and they carry the ark along with them, that by it they might ask counsel of God for him. He had a great concern for the safety of the ark, and therefore orders it back to Jerusalem. None loved the ark and ordinances of the Lord better than he; but since Jerusalem was, by divine appointment, the place for the abode of the ark, he will have it carried back thither; and if the Lord should be pleased to return him to the crown, to the city, to the ark and ordinances of divine worship, well; but if

if otherwise, he is resigned to the divine disposal: *Let him do to me what seemeth good unto him.*

In the words you have two things, *1st*, A supposition, and a very afflicting one, namely, that God might see it meet never to restore him to his kingdom, nor to the ark and ordinances of the Lord, but that he might be slain, or obliged to skulk in some corner of the world the remainder of his days. *2^{dly}*, You have the conclusion he makes upon this supposition; and it is indeed a very good one. He resolves, through grace, to be absolutely resigned to the sovereign will of God. And it is well expressed here, *Let him do to me what seemeth good unto him.* He puts himself in the posture of a servant, waiting his master's orders. He considers God's absolute sovereignty, and thereupon commands his soul into silence. Says he, I have nothing to object, all is good to me that seems good to him. Observe with what complacency and holy satisfaction he speaks of the divine disposal. Not only he can do what he will, subscribing to his power; or, he may do what he will, saying amen to his sovereignty; or, he will do what he will, resting in his unchangeableness; but let him do what he will, approving of the wisdom of his disposals.

DOCTRINE. It is the duty of all, and the disposition of the saints, to be resigned unto the divine disposal in every thing.

I shall, *first*, Mention some things that are no way inconsistent with absolute resignation to God.

First, For a Christian to be sensibly touched with afflicting events, is by no means inconsistent with it. The design of Christianity is not to root out our affections, but to regulate them. Our Lord himself

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was most sensibly affected with the bitterness of the cup which his Father gave him to drink. He was in an agony; his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. But, notwithstanding all this commotion of affections in him, there was no irregularity, no rebellion or murmuring, no flinching from obedience to every point of his Father's will. When he makes a supposition of the cup passing from him, he qualifies it thus; *nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.*

Some, among the heathens of old, affected a stoical apathy, a sullen carelessness about all the afflictions which befel them, death itself not excepted; and for this they were highly applauded by others as ignorant of God as themselves. It was called heroism and greatness of spirit: but, in reality, it was cowardice and baseness of spirit. Such behaviour was so far from being the effect of a truly humbled spirit, which is the only great spirit, that it was the effect of the most insufferable pride and contempt, both of God and his providence. Something of this behaviour appeared among the Jews in Isaiah's time; and we find the Lord imputes it to the pride and stoutness of their hearts, Isa. ix. 9. 10. *And all the people shall know, even Ephraim, and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of their heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars.* That is, providence has blasted this project, but no matter, we will form a better, and be sure to succeed. Therefore, as we must guard on the one hand, against fainting, when we are rebuked of the Lord, so we must guard, on the other, against despising his chastening. We may groan

and be grieved, provided we do not grudge and murmur. We may be sorrowful, but not sullen and obstinate.

Secondly, For a Christian to search into the cause of the Lord's contending with him, is very consistent with absolute resignation to his will. Job says, chap. x. 2. *Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.* The Lord does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; that is, there is a cause for every twig of the rod; and therefore the Christian, under the mighty hand of God, may and ought to reflect upon his former ways, and see if he can find out what part of his conduct has provoked the Lord to lift up his hand against him, that so he may take the rebuke, and amend his ways. But when people search into the dispensations of providence, in the bitterness of their spirits, when they ask reasons of the divine conduct in such and such particulars, because they think it hard and unreasonable, then rebellion has the ascendant of resignation: there is an uproar and mutiny in the soul, by unmortified lusts. Examples of which we have in Job; *Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost, when I came out of the belly? why did the knees prevent me, or the breasts that I should suck?* Such questions, and such reasonings, were not becoming one in his circumstances. The good man Asaph offended in this way also, as we see in the seventy third Psalm.

Thirdly, For a Christian to desire and pray for deliverance from trouble, is no way inconsistent with resignation to the divine disposal. Indeed, to pray absolutely for exemption from trouble while we are in this world, is not agreeable to the will of God, nor

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is there any instance of this in scripture, and so it can never be accepted of God: and to pray positively, without making a reserve to the wise disposal of God, for deliverance from any particular trial, has as little of the Christian in it as the former, and must sound ungratefully in the ears of the hearer of prayer.

But it is not unbecoming, nor unusual, for Christians of the first rank for resignation, to beg of God that he would deliver them from some particular distresses and trials they labour under. We have frequent examples of this in David, in his book of Psalms. Sometimes we find him pleading very earnestly with God for relief, and yet still leaving a full latitude to sovereignty. Thus, in the thirty ninth Psalm, *Remove thy stroke away from me, I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. And again, O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more.* But that he was resigned in all these petitions, appears from ver. 9th, *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.* We have the greatest of all examples for this, in the conduct of the Son of God, Joh. xii. 27, *Father, save me from this hour:* but at the same time, he shews his resigned temper of soul, and full resolution to go through with the work he had undertaken; *but for this cause came I unto this hour.* And again, *Father, if thou be willing, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.* Thus you see the Christian may pray, and that earnestly, for the removal of his trouble; but still he must, in his heart, be resigned to the holy and wise disposal of God.

Fourthly, For the Christian to use all lawful means for deliverance from any particular trouble, is perfectly

consistent with absolute resignation to divine providence. Thus, when the Christian is in bodily distress, and threatened with the dissolution of his frame, although he must be resigned to the will of God, either as to living or dying, yet it is his duty to use all suitable means for restoring himself to health again. Timothy, who it seems was of a tender and delicate constitution, is exhorted by Paul, to use a little wine for his stomach's sake, and his often infirmities. To use the mean is our duty; to be resigned to the will of God with respect to the success of it, is also a duty: and, since they are both duties, the one cannot be inconsistent with the other.

I may add, in the *last* place, That frequent sallies of fretting are not inconsistent with habitual resignation to the will of God. I speak not this to extenuate the sin of murmuring, which is certainly a very great one, and must be very provoking to God, but for the encouragement of some of God's own children, who may be sore cast down, because of their unsubdued spirit, and the occasional eruption of their passion. Such sallies, we see, are incident to the best of saints. Job, whom the Holy Ghost in the New Testament celebrates for his patience, had several impatient fits, and bitter expressions under them, as may be seen in his book. Asaph, in his haste, uttered some indecent, yea, atheistical expressions; yet Job was a resigned saint, and Asaph a believer both in God and his providence.

I proceed, in the *second* place, To open the nature of this absolute resignation to the disposal of God.

First, It implies an approbation of the divine conduct, in the whole and every part of it, as holy and good.

good. If ye would know what is the settled judgment of the Christian, about the conduct of God towards himself or others, we will deliver it in the Psalmist's words, Psal. xviii. 30. *As for God, his way is perfect.* In the preceeding part of the Psalm, he is giving a narrative of some very strange events; and to prevent any unbecoming reflections that others might make upon them, he delivers his own opinion concerning them in these words, *As for God, his way is perfect.* Moses, for a long course of years, had been a spectator of the divine providence. He had seen surprising dispensations both of mercy and judgment; and in his last song he delivers his judgment about them: *He is the rock, his way is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he.*

The resigned Christian, then, is one who thinks well of God, and approves of his conduct as holy, just and good, though it be deep and mysterious to him. He will not take upon him to prescribe rules and methods to the only wise God, like the murmuring unmanageable souls, who are full of big swelling reasonings against God and his providence. Oh how many are the sophisms of unbelief! The solid reasonings of faith faith, *He hath done all things well.*

Secondly, In this Christian resignation, there is an heart-love to the whole, and every part of the divine conduct.

The mind may judge a thing to be right, and the will may comply with it, while, at the same time, there may be the greatest reluctance in the affections. But, as the resigned soul loves the œconomy of grace, so it loves the œconomy of providence. The Christian
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does, with the greatest pleasure and satisfaction, behold his Father's wise and holy hand moving all the wheels of providence. And thus he gets and maintains a calm mind, under the most terrible dispensations.

In the *third* place, In this resignation there is a cheerful compliance with all the disposals of providence. The child of God says, after the example of his elder brother, *not my will but thine be done*; and with the chief Apostle, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* what wilt thou have me to deny? what wilt thou have me to suffer? Give but the word of command, make but the least intimation of what is thy will, and, through grace, mine shall not only acquiesce, but cheerfully comply. No doubt, David loved the crown of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, the ark of God, and the ordinances of his worship; but if it was the will of God that he should enjoy them no longer, he was ready to comply.

But, concerning this resignation, let the following things be more particularly observed.

1st, The subject of Christian resignation, is an heart born again by the Spirit of God. It is one of the graces of the Spirit; but no man hath these graces of the Spirit, but he who is born of the Spirit, and in whom the Spirit dwells. All the graces of the Spirit of God have their counterfeits in hypocrites. As there is a false faith, a false hope, a false joy, so there is a false resignation, which hypocrites are possessed of; something that bears the semblance of true resignation, and passes for it among men. Thus, the sullen and indifferent behaviour of some heathens, under severe calamities, was cried up,
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by their ignorant admirers, as resignation and patience: whereas God, who searches the heart, saw pride and obstinacy to be the springs of their behaviour. We must conclude, that whatever may look like resignation among men, arising from a natural sweetness of temper, or whatever advantages some may have for the practice of it, arising from constitution or example, yet that resignation, which is in the sight of God of great price, is as much a work of his Spirit as faith or any other grace. None but such can be loyal subjects in the kingdom of God. All others are malecontents: and, from their nature, must be so. It was a most blasphemous speech of one, that if he had been in the divine counsel, he would have ordered things much better than he thought God had done: and yet that poor miscreant did but speak out what secretly lurks in the hearts of all natural men. We may lay it down as a certain rule, that whosoever are not the subjects of God's kingdom of grace, can never be dutiful subjects in his kingdom of providence. A man who is not pleased with the grace of God, will never be pleased with his providence, except in so far as it enables him to please his own self-will. Providence, then, which contradicts the rebels self-will, may break his back; but it is only the grace of God which can bow his heart into a cheerful compliance with the divine will. When Paul became a subject of the kingdom of grace, his first petition was, *Lord what wilt thou have me to do?*

Secondly, The proper object of Christian resignation is God in Christ. The object of the heathens resignation, such as it was, was God absolutely considered. A sinner out of Christ, who apprehends God

as his enemy, may indeed, in a sense, submit to his will, just as the malefactor submits to the sentence of his judge, because there is no possibility of eviting it : whereas the real Christian not only submits to the will of God, because it cannot be resisted, but, by grace, his spirit is brought to a complacency in it : for he considers it as the will of God in Christ, breathing not only a display of the wisdom and power of God, but good to him ; and so he would not wish it to be otherwise. Paul lays it down for certain, that *all things shall work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*. Try then the reality of your resignation by the object of it. Do ye resign yourselves to God, absolutely considered, or to God in Christ as your God.

Thirdly, The extent of Christian resignation is unto all things. The Christian has no reserve : he does not except against any part of the will of God, either as to doing or suffering. The hypocrite would be content to resign himself in some things to the will of God, that is, in such things as do not cross his own will ; which is by no means acceptable resignation. The murmurers think they could be resigned to any dispensation but the present, and so they are never easy : whereas the true Christian preserves a serene mind under every dispensation ; for he reckons himself in the hands of a friend, wise to contrive, powerful to execute, and faithful to fulfil whatever is for his good.

But it may be useful to be more particular here.

In the *first* place, then, The Christian is resigned to the will of God, with respect to his station and calling in the world. The great Governor of the
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world allots unto men their several posts and stations in life. Men, therefore, ought to show their resignation to him in these, by resting satisfied with their outward condition whatever it be. The various conditions of life are like so many seats placed one above another, whereof God hath the disposal. He calls one man, and sets him high, and another beneath him; the third lower still, and so on as it pleaseth him. Now, it is the duty, and the disposition of every true Christian, to be perfectly pleased with the seat assigned him, be it high or low, till God say, arise and go up higher, or arise and come down lower, or arise and give up thy accounts.

Secondly, The Christian is resigned to the will of God with respect to his gifts. *There are diversities of gifts, though there be but one spirit*; and his wisdom and sovereignty are very brightly displayed in bestowing these. To one is given, by the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, and so on. Now, it is the duty of the Christian, unto whom the Spirit has distributed more sparingly, to be resigned to the will of God in this matter; and to occupy with what God gives him, and not to envy others on account of their superior abilities. For be his station in the body of Christ never so low, it is both honourable and necessary.

Thirdly, He is resigned to God with respect to his constitution and health. Health is, so to speak, the sauce of our earthly enjoyments. Without it every thing of this kind loses its relish, and many of them become nauseous. Some are of a robust constitution, and little know what trouble is. Others, like Timothy, have their often infirmities. The Lord is the

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maker of them both. He lodges one soul in a strong, another in a weak tabernacle, as it seemeth good unto him: and therefore it is the duty of every Christian, to be pleased with that body in which his sovereign hath lodged his soul.

Fourthly, The people of God are resigned to his will, with respect to the measure of comfort they are to draw out of earthly things. Houses, lands, riches, friends, and all other things, are neither less nor more to us than what God makes them. Hence, Solomon observes, that *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*. He puts every degree of innocent pleasure into these things which they severally convey. Hence, from the same object, you have sometimes comfort, and sometimes bitterness. God holds the scales in his hand, and weighs out comfort at one time, and sorrow at another time, and that from the same earthly thing.

Again, He is resigned with respect to esteem and reputation in the world. The good name is as precious ointment, much to be desired; but, in the depths of sovereign wisdom, it sometimes falls out, that a good man's maintaining the truth, and maintaining a good name in the world, are inconsistent. Thus it was with our Saviour himself. How unfavoury was his name among the Jews? what reproaches did they cast upon him? The Apostles after him were looked upon as seditious persons: they lost their good name, but it was in a good cause, even the cause of truth; and so they lost it cheerfully.

Sixthly, Believers are resigned to the will of God as to all the afflictions which befall them in the course of their lives; and this takes in various things. They
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are resigned with respect to the kind of their afflictions. Heaven is the workhouse, so to speak, where crosses are made; and there are various kinds of them: but were the resigned Christian to have them all laid before him, and allowed to lift any one of them that he thought himself best able to bear, he would absolutely decline choosing for himself, and humbly desire of the Lord, that he would choose for him; and in doing so, he would discover much wisdom as well as resignation: for never was a stone in the building more fit for its place, than the cross chosen by the Lord for the shoulders of the Christian who bears it.

They are resigned with respect to the measure of afflictions. As we are not to choose the kind, neither are we to choose the degree of our troubles. Two Christians may have each a trial of the same kind, and yet the trial of the one may be to a far greater degree than that of the other. God, in his wisdom, infuses more gall and wormwood into one cup than into another: but he who has the bitterest cup, if he is truly resigned, will say, after the example of his elder brother, *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

Again, The Christian is resigned in respect of the multitude of his troubles. The Psalmist says, *many are the troubles of the righteous*: what he adds is very comfortable; *but the Lord delivereth them out of them all*. Jacob, Job, David, and other Scripture saints, were exercised with a multitude of afflictions. Sometimes they rolled thick upon them, like one wave upon the back of another: and this is the lot of some valuable Christians still. They go always bowed

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down. There is no period of life but what is filled up with a variety of trials. This is a proper field for resignation to display its strength and activity in.

Again, Real Christians are resigned as to the continuance of their trials. Some are afflicted in one period of their lives, and some in another, and some all the days of their appointed time. If it is the will of God, that we shall have no respite till we ly down in our graves, we must lay our hands on our mouths, and say, good is the will of the Lord, let it be done.

In the *last* place, Believers are resigned to the will of God with respect to their removal out of this world; and this is a matter of very great consequence. It is a piece of the mystery, and of the trial of faith, that the Christian's way to heaven should be through death and the grave: that after a stormy and tempestuous life, he must set his feet into the cold and deep waters of Jordan, before he can tread upon the promised land. The Christian is resigned with respect to death, absolutely considered, as it is a separation of the essential parts of human nature, soul and body. Death has carried on a war against human nature ever since sin invaded it; and since there is no discharge of that warfare, the Christian resolves to engage in it, hoping to be victorious through his Redeemer. The Christian is resigned with respect to the manner of his death, whether it be natural or violent, sudden or lingering. Paul speaks out a resigned temper in this matter, Acts xxi. 13. *I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus.* He remembered how cheerfully Christ had died for him at Jerusalem; and now he is ready to die for Christ there also. God hath appointed but one

one way of coming into the world, but there are various ways of going out of it: but it is no great matter with the Christian which way he go out of it, if he gets safely to his Father's house at last. He is resigned also as to the time of his death. Jacob, the heir of the promise, is starved almost for want of bread in the land of promise, and is obliged to remove with his family into Egypt, where he dies, and leaves his family to be sore and long oppressed. Moses dies on mount Nebo, after he had seen the promised land, and was told he should never set his foot on it. David must be content to leave the world without seeing a stone laid in the temple of his God, though he had gotten the pattern of it, and provided materials for it. Good king Josiah must die in the field of battle, for not hearkening to the words of Nechoh from the mouth of God. It is an happy thing for believers, that their times are wholly in the hand of God: that he has the sole power of retaining and dismissing our spirits. Were people allowed to choose the time of their leaving the world, what disorder would it occasion? Some would be for staying longer in the world than God has use for them; and others would be for going away before they had finished their day as an hireling. In a fit of grief, or hour of temptation, they would cry out with Job, *to be hid in the grave*, though God had more work to be accomplished by them. The real Christian resolves to be still doing, till the great Master say, stop: then he cheerfully resigns his saved soul into the hands of God his Saviour.

We proceed now to enquire, why we should be thus absolutely resigned unto the divine disposal in all things. And,

First,

First, We should be so, because he is God, and there is none else besides him. This is a reason assigned by God himself, and therefore it should have weight with us, Psal. xlv. 10. *Be still, and know that I am God.* When Manasseh was under affliction, and got good by it, it is said, that then he *knew that the Lord he was God.* One great lesson to be learned in the school of affliction is, to know God; and it is long before we learn this aright. If we did, we would not be so stiff-necked and rebellious under his holy hand. If you ask, what is God? Any body will answer, he is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, and so on. But if they really believed him to be what they call him, would they have such a world of difficulties in committing all unto his disposal? No surely. Is it meet to be said to this God, what doest thou? or why doest thou thus? For he giveth not account of any of his matters. Does it become any of us to say, why are my comforts taken from me, while the comforts of others are continued with them? why is my way to the kingdom through thorns and briers, while others ride upon high places? why do others walk in the light, and in perfect calm, while I go mourning without the sun? Are these, and such as these, decent questions to be put to the Most High? Know ye not that all these things, whereof ye unjustly complain, are the wondrous doings of the Lord, and therefore challenge your absolute resignation. The great ones of the earth have their special favourites, whom they love and honour above others, and they must not be quarrelled for this. They claim as a privilege, to choose their favourites, and to dispense their favours as they please.

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If it be thus among men, will we not leave God at the same liberty? must men prescribe to him, or arraign his procedure at their bar? or, shall those who deserve nothing complain, because they enjoy not every thing? My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Secondly, We ought to be resigned, because he is the Creator, and we are the workmanship of his hands. *Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker.* Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth. *Shall the clay say unto him that fashioneth it, what makest thou? or thy work, he hath no hands. Who art thou O man that repliest against God?* Be thou never so high, never so far exalted above thy fellow creatures, thou art still but a man: why then wilt thou exalt thyself above God, secretly quarrelling with his conduct, and prescribing rules to him. See how God humbles the prince of Tyrus, when he was swelled with pride like the foam of the sea, Ezek. xxviii. 6. *Therefore thus saith the Lord God, because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; Behold, therefore, I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas.* We were merely passive in our first formation; and it is highly reasonable, that in God's management of us, we should be also passive; not offering to choose for ourselves, but resting in the choice of God, be what it will. True Christians say, in the language of the Psalmist in the forty seventh Psalm, *He shall choose our inheritance for us.*

Thirdly,

Thirdly, God is the sovereign disposer of all things. He is not only clothed with omnipotency, whereby he can do every thing, but with sovereignty, whereby he may do whatever he pleases. As the potter, he has power over the clay, to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour. *He does in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, what seems good unto him.* None can defeat his counsels. He sways an uncontrollable sceptre over all that are in heaven, earth or hell. *And who art thou that resistest his will; thou whose breath is in thy nostrils, and art no way to be accounted of!* what an inconsiderable creature art thou among the multitude of beings which are the subjects of Zion's king!

Lastly, We ought to be absolutely resigned to God, because he is the best disposer of all things. The whole household of faith assent to this: he doth all things well. We know not what is best for us, and yet we are fond of choosing for ourselves. The great Pilot of the creation steers always a right course for carrying the passengers to glory. *As for him, his way is perfect, though it be in the deep waters. Though clouds and darkness be round about him, justice and judgment are the habitations of his throne.* The whole œconomy of providence is directed by unerring wisdom, tempered with mercy and truth to them that fear God. And in the issue, all things shall be found to have wrought together for their good.

Now, as resignation is the duty of all, so it is the disposition of the saints in particular: For,

1st, Resignation is a part of the new nature formed in them by the Holy Ghost. Hence, as I observed before, it is ranked among the fruits of the Spirit,
Gal.

Gal. v. 22, 23. and can be in none but those in whom the Spirit has begun that good work of grace, which shall be perfected in glory. The new creature is by nature a meek, quiet, and resigned creature; even as the old man is by nature an untame, fierce, and rebellious creature.

Resignation is as essential a part of the new nature, as rebellion is of the old; and therefore it is and must be the disposition of every saint.

2dly, This resignation is an eminent piece of conformity to Jesus Christ: and that, ye know, is the earnest desire, the interest, the honour, as well as the indispensable duty of all his saints, Phil. ii. 5. 1 Joh. ii. 6. Nothing appeared more gloriously in Christ, than resignation to his Father's will. This grace, this duty was exemplified by him, both in his doing and suffering; and it was warmly inculcated by him upon his disciples. Now, if this be so, what sort of Christians must these be, who are not habitually resigned to the will of God, but constantly disposed to quarrel and censure his ways as unequal? They contradict the precept and example of Christ, and so blaspheme that worthy name by which they are called.

3dly, We find the saints recorded in scripture to have been thus disposed: not but that they sometimes rebelled and murmured under the hand of the Lord. But, then, this was not their habitual temper and practice: this they did not allow in themselves; nay, they condemned it in themselves, and were grieved for it; witness Asaph in the 73d Psalm. They were so far from priding themselves in it, that they were pained for it, and mourned over it before the Lord. Therefore, when we meet with any bitter expressions about

the conduct of providence, uttered by any of the saints in scripture, as Job and others, we must consider them as uttered in their haste, and in the heat of temptation, and not as their settled judgment about the divine conduct.

Lastly, This resignation to the divine will, is an eminent piece of Sanctification. David could not have said any thing that favoured more of a spirit of holiness, than the words of the text; *Lo, here am I, let him do to me what seemeth good unto him.* All the graces of the Spirit, such as faith, love, joy, patience, are so closely connected with resignation, that they cannot be in any person without it.

I proceed now to the application.

Is it the duty of all, and the disposition of the saints, to be absolutely resigned to the will of God? Then,

1st, This doctrine reproves all those who censure the ways of God as unequal, because they cannot or will not see the reason of them. This was the sin of Israel, Ezek. xviii. 29. *Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal, are not your ways unequal.* Nothing could have been said more false and injurious, being a flat contradiction to what David said by the Spirit, concerning the way of God, Psal. xviii. 30. And the Lord refutes the vile calumny cast upon his ways, by a solemn appeal to the consciences of the calumniators, wherein he desires them to consider his ways and their own ways, that they might take their censure off the former, and lay it upon the latter, where it justly deserved to ly.

My brethren, call not the ways of God unequal, because they ly not square with the perverse wills of men.

men. They are perfectly agreeable unto the eternal rule of righteousness, and unto the eternal decree, whereof they are the accomplishment.

2dly, This doctrine reproves murmurers and fretters under cross events of providence. Murmurers and complainers, you see, are put in a very black roll, Jude ver. 16. They are the persons upon whom the Lord is to execute judgment; and they deserve it very justly: for, after a sort, they set up themselves as dictators to the only wise God. They are not satisfied with the divine conduct either towards themselves or others. They misconstrue not only the mysterious, but likewise the plain and easy events of providence. Any dispensation but the present, they think, would be tolerable. In short, your murmurers are the most unmanageable creatures in all the divine dominions. They cannot please God, and God cannot please them; and so they live in a constant war against heaven, and behave as if they had put on a resolution always to oppose the will of God.

3dly, This doctrine reproves those who use undue means to better their outward condition, as fraud, oppression, injustice, anxious carefulness, and the like. Such persons are not satisfied with God's allowance. They are not content with their present condition; and this is a great sin, though it is very little thought of, because it is so common. It may be called *Gad, for a troop cometh*. It is a teeming womb of sins, and those of a very heinous nature.

Let me therefore exhort you to an absolute resignation unto the divine disposal in every thing: and, to enforce it, I offer these motives following.

First, Consider the absolute sovereignty of God,

whose are all things, and who may dispose of them as he pleases. May not I do with mine own what I please, is a stile in which none may speak but Jehovah, who sits upon the circle of the earth, while the inhabitants of it are as grasshoppers before him. Now, unto holy souls their is a shining beauty in sovereignty. We read but once of our Saviour's rejoicing in spirit; and the occasion of it was remarkable, namely, a display of his Father's sovereignty, Matth. xi. 25. The mysteries of grace, as well as the mysteries of providence, must be resolved into the sovereign will of God. Why was Jacob chosen, and Esau rejected? Why was the gospel revealed unto babes, that is, unto poor, weak, and despised persons, while it was hid from the great ones of the world, the men of parts and power? Why are we privileged with the means of grace, while others, partaking of the same human nature, are sunk in the darkness of ignorance? Why, all these are the doings of him who giveth not account of his matters. Why was this part of the creation an angel, that a man, and this a worm? Not from their own choice; but, merely, because the sovereign Lord would have it so. Why are some kingdoms of the world razed, and others raised? Why are some families flourishing, while others are fading? Why are some healthy, while others are sore troubled? How is it that heavy calamities befall some, while others escape, who have no title to Heaven's special favour? The reason is still the same; *Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.*

Secondly, Consider the absolute power of God. Job ix. 4. *He is mighty in strength.* The greatest men in the world have a prescribed power: there are bounds
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and limits set unto it. Thus far it may go, but no further: and hence we are called, not to fear the fury of the oppressor. Yea, the devil himself, who bears the pompous and magnificent title of god of this world, lyes bound in a chain strongly twisted by Jehovah's hand, so that it cannot be broken: nor can he do any thing but as the chain is lengthened out. But Jehovah himself is not only powerful: he is the Omnipotent: he can do every thing that is consistent with his perfections. *He formeth the mountains, and createth the wind. He declareth unto man what is his thought, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth. The Lord of Hosts is his name.* It is he who created the heavens and the earth, and upholds them by the word of his power. It is he who, by a deluge of water, swept away the old ungodly world. It is he who rained fire and brimstone upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whereby they were turned into ashes, and were made an example unto those who afterwards should live ungodly. It is he who parted the waters of the red sea for a passage to his people, while he caused them to meet upon Pharaoh, and his chariots, and his horsemen, so that *they sank like lead in the mighty waters.* It is he who caused the earth to open and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, so that all that were round about fled at the cry of them; for they said, *lest the earth swallow us up also.* It is he who sent forth his angel, and smote in Sennacherib's army an hundred and fourscore and five thousand men in one night. These are instances of the mighty power of God, in a way of judgment: and there are not wanting as eminent instances of his power in a way of mercy. And, after such an account of
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the power of the Most High, wilt thou, O man, lift up thine hand against him. Thou art, in his hand, less by far than the moth in thine own. He can bruise us, he can speak, yea, he can look us into nothing.

3dly, Consider the infinite wisdom of God, as it is displayed in the whole œconomy of providence. Job ix. 4. *He is wise in heart.* Praise and glory are ascribed unto him, under the title of God only wise, Rom. xvi. ult. Men of power often want wisdom to direct them in the execution of their power, for great men are not always wise, and so their power degenerates into tyranny and oppression, and often ends in the ruin both of the ruler and ruled. But the Generalissimo of the world, the great Pilot of the universe, is God only and infinitely wise. All his measures are laid with such depth of wisdom, that nothing can disconcert them. He sees into all possible futurities, so that no event can surprise him. However the sons of men may be alarmed, his holy and wise hand is always at the upper end of the chain, and he knows and moves every link of it. He sets all the wheels in motion, from the least to the greatest, and they move no way without his direction. There cannot so much as a hair fall to the ground without his will. This we think a very trivial thing, and yet there is a divine hand in it. The bullets fly promiscuously in the day of battle, yet they are so under the direction of God, that they fall only on those whom he has a mind to kill, and pass by those whom he intends to save alive.

A beautiful line of wisdom runs through the whole scene of providence, which challenges an entire and absolute resignation. The world has now lasted more than five thousand years; and, during that vast period,

od, there have been strange convulsions and commotions in it. But we may challenge both men and devils, to name but one event of providence, from the creation of the world to this very day, that can in the least impeach the wisdom of its Governor. Your most accomplished statesmen and politicians have been guilty of great imprudencies; they have committed most notorious blunders in their public conduct. But our God has not only the management of this and the other petty kingdom, but he presides over this whole world, and likewise over the other world, that world of spirits; yet never was there, is there, or shall there be, one piece of mal-administration in all his dominions: therefore be you absolutely resigned to the conduct of this wise God, who *is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.*

4thly, Consider the justice and equity of him who rules in Jacob, and unto the ends of the earth. Moses, the man of God, after he had seen many strange scenes of providence, gives ample testimony to this, Deut. xxxii. 4. *He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity: just and right is he.* He does all things in number, weight and measure. He acts according to the eternal rule of righteousness. True, indeed, his own people bear the burden and heat of the day, while his enemies ly at ease: the former are often sore afflicted, while the latter have things prospering to their wish. But, my brethren, think honourably of God, notwithstanding this seemingly unequal distribution. Love nor hatred are not known by any of these things. Neither poverty nor riches, are badges of Heaven's special favour. The best and the worst of men have been

been in either state. And if this will not satisfy the unsubdued murmuring sinners, if they will still reflect upon the Governor of the world, as if his ways were unequal, let them know, that there is a day coming, when God will convince them of the hard speeches which they have spoken against him. Then we shall have a clear commentary upon this obscure text, the providence of God, when the great reasons of state shall be declared, why this nation or kingdom was overthrown, while another, that was as wicked, continued to flourish. Why so many good men were oppressed and borne down, while some of the worst of men had more than their heart could wish. Then the mystery of providence will be clearly unfolded, to the great joy of the resigned, and to the conviction and terrible consternation of the murmurers, who shall go speechless to the pit.

5thly, Consider the faithfulness and mercy of God, that so ye may be absolutely resigned unto his disposal. Moses, in that forecited place, celebrates the truth and faithfulness of God, as well as his justice: And Joshua, the successor of Moses, who likewise beheld many strange scenes of providence, gives testimony to the same truth, when he had a near view of death. He appeals unto the consciences of the people, if any *one thing had failed of all the good things which the Lord their God spake concerning them*, Josh. xxiii. 14. We are greatly surprized with some dispensations of providence, which now and then fall out in the world: But every one of them is the accomplishment of the divine purpose, which should silence you: and some of them are the accomplishment of the divine mercy, which should make you rejoice. He is good, and
kind

kind, and merciful, who then would not be resigned to his disposal. Ye never saw, read or heard of any dispensation of providence, so strangely checkered with judgment, as that there were no vestiges of the divine goodness in it.

But to move you further to this absolute resignation unto the divine disposal, consider some other things: As,

1st. That resignation is one of those things which God values very highly, as the apostle Peter declares, 1 Pet. iii. 4. Satan and the world call this meekness meanness, and this quietness under the Lord's hand, dulness and stupidity; for they have names of reproach to all the graces of the Spirit, and to all the duties of christianity: But the judgment of God is always according to truth; and it is in favour of the meek, humble, and resigned souls. Though they are among the despised things of the world, though they be counted as the filth and offscouring of all things, like the apostles of old, yet God never thinks the less of them, but still honours, esteems and loves them. As an evidence of this, observe what he says, Isa. lxvi. 1, 2. *Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* He challenges the Jews here, to find him a place to dwell in; but presently he finds out one for himself, and one that they would never have dreamed of, so long as they had a pompous and magnificent temple for him; and that

was the heart of a poor and contrite man, that trembled at his word. They would despise such a dwelling; but observe how highly Jehovah speaks of it. *The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; for all those things hath mine hand made.* But I have a piece of workmanship that I value more than them all, and that is, a poor and contrite spirit; a humble, self-denied, resigned soul: and I will enter into that soul as my habitation, and I will dwell in it, when your temple shall be no more; yea, when the heavens and the earth shall be no more: for I will dwell in it for ever.

Secondly, Consider the many precious promises made to meek and resigned souls, which ye can never claim the benefit of, so long as ye behave like *bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke*. It is promised to the meek, that they shall eat, and shall be satisfied, Psal. xxii. 26. Though they may have but a little, yet of that little they shall eat and be satisfied, while the wicked, in their fulness, shall be in straits. While others cry incessantly, *Who will shew us any good?* and, like birds of prey, catch at every thing they like, right or wrong, when they have got all, they will still be dissatisfied: whereas the resigned soul, that receives the smallest portion from God's hand with thankfulness, will find such satisfaction in it, as will make him far more happy than if he had all the revenues of the wicked. See also, Psal. xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.* These are two great and precious promises. If your spirits are absolutely resigned unto the divine disposal, God will guide you in judgment; that is, he will guide you in your practical judgment of things: he will

will teach you to distinguish between good and evil, sin and duty. In all circumstances he will direct your steps, so that ye shall not turn aside. Now, my brethren, this is a great benefit to those that are living in an insnaring world, and who have enemies within them, ready to lead them aside. If you will but shut your eyes, and give your hand to the Lord, he will lead you safely through all dangers. Moreover, as he will teach you your way, so he will teach you his way; his way of grace, and his way of providence: that is a deep and mysterious way, and yet most perfect, though the world fret and stumble at it. He will shew you, how the strangest ways of his providence are consistent with the eternal rule of righteousness, and with the promise, which secures a happy issue of all trials to them that love him. That is likewise a precious promise made to the meek, Isa. xxix.

19. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the holy One of Israel. Observe, it is not said, the meek shall have joy, but that they *shall increase their joy*; intimating, that in the midst of their afflictions, and when there is as yet no prospect of deliverance, they have joy; but when the deliverance cometh, they increase their joy. If ye would have God to strengthen your heart, ye must be of good courage. If ye would have him to increase your joy, ye must not faint nor repine, but be resigned in tribulation. Another promise made to the meek, you have, Psal. cxlix. 4. *For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.* There is a twofold salvation he will beautify them with. 1st, A temporal salvation, by delivering them from their trou-

bles and distreffes; so that, *though they have lien among the pots, yet they shall be as doves, whose wings are covered with silver, and feathers with yellow gold.* 2dly, With an eternal salvation. He will beautify them *with the fine linen of the saints; with the robe of Christ's righteousness; so that they shall shine forth as the sun; yea, they shall outshine all the angels of heaven.* They, in all their glory, are not arrayed like one of the saints. Let not the people of God, therefore, be discouraged; though they have lien among the pots; for the Lord will be *the lifter up of their head.* He will give them *beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.* It is said of him, that *he lifteth up the meek, while he casteth the wicked to the ground.* Men tread upon the shrubs and branches that ly among their feet; but those who humble themselves under God's hand, and cast themselves down at his feet, he does not tread upon, but lifts them up and sets them on high; whereas he takes pleasure in mortifying the proud, and casting them down to the ground. The last promise I shall mention, made to meek and resigned souls, is their *inheriting the earth*: and this is made both in the Old and New Testament, Psal. xxxvii. 11. Matth. v. 5. However small their portion of this earth may be, yet there shall be new heavens, and a new earth, of which the fretters and murmurers shall not enjoy one foot breadth; but, being turned out of this cursed earth which they possessed before, they shall be thrown down to the pit, where they shall murmur through eternity: whereas the meek shall inhabit the new earth, without molestation from any hand.

3dly, Con-

3dly, Consider the threatenings denounced against such as fret and murmur under the hand of the Lord. The Lord, by the prophet, denounces a wo against him that striveth with his Maker, Isa. xlv. 9. And it is several thousand years, since he threatened to come forth with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon murmurers and complainers. It seems the day of judgment is appointed with a peculiar view unto them, among others, Jude ver. 15, 16. Think with yourselves, my brethren, what terror, confusion and shame, will seize upon the murmurers at that day, when they shall see him with their eyes against whom they murmured, and when they shall hear him with their ears, accounting for, and justifying all those dispensations of his providence, which they fretted at as hard and unreasonable; when they shall hear him, convincing them of their ungodly thoughts and ungodly speeches, which they uttered against him and his ways, so effectually, that they shall have nothing to reply in their own defence. How will they be nonplussed? How will they be filled with shame and confusion, and cry to the rocks and mountains to fall on them? Therefore, since there is a day coming, when God will clearly account for his administration, take heed to your spirits: judge nothing before the time: pass no rash censures upon him and his ways now, lest ye be put to open shame at that day, *when he will come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.*

4thly, An unresigned temper of spirit, as it is dishonouring to God, so it is extremely hurtful unto yourselves. A murmurer against God is his own tormentor: he is the worst kind of cannibal, for he eats his

his own flesh : he keeps himself in a perpetual ferment, and pines away by his own ill-natured and rebellious spirit : Job v. 2. *Envy slayeth the silly one.* And Solomon calls it the *rottenness of the bones*, Prov. xiv. 30. The misery of the murmurer is, that he can be satisfied with nothing that he has, because of something that he wants. God's taking or withholding something from him that his heart lusteth after, makes him like Amnon, to be lean from day to day, and to despise all the other good things that he enjoys. Thus Ahab fell sick amidst all the riches, honours and pleasures of a kingdom, because of Naboth's vineyard. And Haman, notwithstanding his riches and preferment at court, cried out, *Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate*, Esth. v. 13. And Rachel was so impatient for children, that nothing could make her relish life without them : *Give me children, says she, else I die.* Thus, murmuring under one cross, makes people overlook and undervalue many mercies : yea, it makes them not enjoy, but suffer life.

5thly, Absolute resignation to the divine will keeps a person sweet and easy in all circumstances. He that can just lay himself and all his concerns down at the Lord's feet, with humble confidence that all shall be well, has a serenity of mind much to be desired. That man is fit for all circumstances. Be he poor or rich, high or low, living or dying, he is perfectly easy ; and can say with the prophet Habakkuk, *Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice*

rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. At present, ye live in a world full of uncertainties. If it is well with you to-day, it may be ill with you to-morrow. Ye know not what variety may be in your lot. But if ye are possessed of the resigned temper, you will find yourselves easy in every change.

6thly, Resignation is the way to get good of all your afflictions. It will turn all your crosses into mercies. They who are so impatient, that they must have the plaster presently removed, need not be surprised that the sore is not whole. And those who will not ly still till the Lord hew and polish them, shall never be pillars in the heavenly Jerusalem, but shall be thrown down as rubbish into the pit. They who will not endure the Lord's furnace of affliction, shall be consumed as dross and stubble by the fire of his wrath, while those who patiently endure the trial, shall at last be brought out of the furnace shining and pure as gold, Job xxiii. 10. Know, then, that the end of your afflictions is your sanctification. And if ever ye would attain that blessed end, be resigned: wait the Lord's time. If he casts you down, ly still till his own hand lift you up; and then ye shall stand and never fall.

7thly, Consider that your murmuring cannot stop the purposes of God, nor change the course of his providence: for he is of one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doth. *The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever:* and this is a part of it, that, through many tribulations the righteous must enter into the kingdom of God. *In the world ye shall have tribulation.* There is no peradventure here: it is positively asserted. Now, shall the

the stated method of providence be altered, to gratify every peevish complainer? Must the purposes of the only wise God be broken for our ease, and to please our humour?

To conclude. Christ was resigned. And shall the Christian rebel, and so blaspheme the worthy name by which he is called? Nay, but on the contrary, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, with respect to his Father's will.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N VIII.

The Free Grace of G O D illustrated in
pardoning insolvent Debtors.

LUKE vii. 41, 42.

Ver. 41. *There was a certain creditor, who had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.*

Ver. 42. *And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most ?*

WHILE our Saviour sat at meat, in the house of Simon the Pharisee, a very memorable passage fell out, in the conversion and public remission of a sinner, which is brought in with a note of wonder in the 37th verse. *And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, or a notorious sinner, abandoned to luxury and lewdness : yet this woman, out of a true remorse for her past life, seeks to the Saviour, and obtained forgiveness.*

There are three great things observable in her history. 1. Great sins. 2. Great repentance and humiliation. 3. Great love and grace of God through Christ, in pardoning sin.

The scene betwixt our Saviour and this sinner, Simon beheld with a grudge; and was likely to lose, by means of it, the good opinion he had conceived of our Saviour : therefore he says within himself, *This man,*

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if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Our Saviour knew these were the sentiments of the man's heart, though he did not speak them out. He knew likewise, that his error rather proceeded from ignorance and weakness, than from malice and wickedness; and he convinces him of it in a very gentle and easy way, even by a parable, of which our text is a part. *There was a certain creditor, &c.*

In which words we are to notice, 1. The parties spoken of, viz. a creditor and his two debtors. The creditor is the almighty God: so he is called in other places, as Matt. xviii. 24. Our Saviour expoundeth this himself, ver. 35. *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* The two debtors are mankind sinners, whose debts are their sins, and who are directed to pray for the forgiveness of those debts: *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

2. We have a description of the debtors, and that in three particulars. 1st, They are described from their number, two, Simon the Pharisee, and this woman, who had been a notorious sinner. So some expound it. But parables ought not to be strained; it is enough if we keep the general scope and intent of them always in our eye. Therefore, under these two all mankind are comprehended, all the posterity of Adam, *who have all sinned and come short of the glory of God*; especially such as are within the pale of the visible church, and make an external profession of Christianity. We are all debtors to God, and our sins are our debts.

debts. Hence, what, in Matt. vi. 12. is called debts, is, in Luke xi. 4. called sins : so that sins and debts are convertible terms in scripture. *2dly*, They are described from the quantity of their debts. *The one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.* The Roman penny was of our money seven-pence halfpenny : so the first of these debtors would be owing fifteen pounds twelve shillings and six-pence ; and the other one pound eleven shillings and three-pence in our money. The design of this part of the parable, is, to shew us that there are degrees of guilt among sinners. Tho' all are guilty, yet all are not equally guilty before God : " For some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others." *3dly*, They are described from their inability to pay the smallest part of their respective debts. They had nothing wherewith to pay. He who owed but fifty pence could not pay a farthing of it, more than he who owed five hundred pence. We are all insolvent debtors ; we are bankrupts ; we cannot so much as pay a penny of the pound : nay, we can pay nothing at all. Man, by sin, hath disabled himself from doing any thing that can carry any shew of recompence unto God.

3. We have a description of the creditor, from his kindness and clemency towards these poor insolvent debtors : *He frankly forgave them both.* He not only forgave one, but he forgave them both ; and he did it frankly, freely and cheerfully. This is a lively representation of God's forgiving sinners. He is a God ready to pardon, and he pardons freely, receiving nothing from us as the price thereof.

4. We have our Saviour's question upon the case :

Which of them will love him most? And he approves of Simon's answer to it, ver. 34. I suppose he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged. All those whom God has forgiven for Christ's sake, will love him; but they to whom he has forgiven most, ought to love him most.

I have already discoursed somewhat on that most inestimable privilege, the pardon of sin, from Psal. xxxii. 1. I would, through divine assistance, pursue the same subject a little further from this text, which gives us occasion to consider the following particulars. *1st*, That sinners are indebted persons unto God. Sins are called debts in scripture, as has been already observed. Now, Sinners are debtors to God in respect of obedience, which should be performed, and in respect of punishment for disobedience, which should be undergone.

1st, Sinners are indebted to God in respect of obedience. The first Adam, in the covenant of works, was God's hired servant. Obedience was the work, and eternal life was the wages. And tho' it may be said, that had he continued obedient, he would have merited eternal life: yet this merit would not have arisen from the intrinsic worth of his obedience, which bore no proportion to his reward, but from the paction which God was pleased to enter into with him. Should you promise to a person a very great reward for a very small and inconsiderable service, the person who does the service, merits the reward only by virtue of the promise you made him.

And this, by the way, shews us the staring absurdity of the popish doctrine of merit. For if Adam, in his innocent state, could not have merited at God's hand,

hand, but by virtue of the paction or covenant which God made with him, with what confidence can a sinner, drowned in debt to his justice, pretend to merit any good thing at his hand?

Obedience, then, is a debt which the creature owes to its Creator: and our inability to obedience, which is common to us all, does not discharge the debt, or secure us from the arrests of the creditor. The covenant of works was broken, but it was on man's side only: therefore, God's right to command still remains, tho' our ability to obey be gone. Even as among men, a debtor's inability to pay does not cancel his bond, but the creditor has still action against him.

2dly, Sinners are indebted to God in respect of punishment for disobedience, which should be undergone. God said to Adam, *In the day thou eatest thou shalt surely die*: and long after, he said to the Jews, *The soul that sinneth it shall die*. As the debtor that cannot pay is still liable to arrests and imprisonment, so the unpardoned sinner lyes under the curse of the law, and is doomed to the eternal prison of Tophet. And what is commonly said of prisons, that they pay no debts, holds true of God's great prison, hell; from which, may he, of his infinite mercy thro' Christ, deliver us. Unpardoned sinners are at last shut up in the prison of hell; not that they may pay their debt and satisfy justice there, but because they cannot pay their debt nor satisfy justice.

The next thing that falls under consideration, and is to be demonstrate, is, that sin is the very worst kind of debt: so that those who are debtors this way, are in a most miserable situation.

1st, Sin is a debt contracted to an infinite Majesty. That which put an accent of the deepest sorrow on David's sin, was he against whom he had sinned, viz. the great God: therefore, in the most mournful of all his penitential psalms, the 51st, he cries out, *'Gainst thee, thee only have I sinned.* David, in what he is there lamenting, had sinned against several persons; he had sinned against himself, against Bathsheba, against Uriah the Hittite, and against Joab, whom he had made accessary to the murder of that man in the letter he sent him, whereby he was obliged to place him in the fore front of the hottest battle, and that on purpose that he might die. He had sinned against the commonwealth of Israel, and against the heathens, whose mouths he had opened to blaspheme. Yet, when he falls down at a throne of grace, he cries, *Against thee, thee only have I sinned:* which words are to be taken as spoken not simply, but comparatively: As if he had said, tho' by my sins I have many ways offended man, and wronged him; yet the wrong I have done in this to any man, is nothing in comparison of the wrong, the dishonour, and the contempt that I have done to thy majesty.

Other debts are owing to men like ourselves. Suppose them much higher and greater than we, they are still men of the same make, and of like passions with ourselves: but when we sin, we run in debt to the most high God. The dignity of the person offended, puts an aggravation on the offence. To offend a magistrate, or a person in public office, is worse than to offend a private person; to offend the supreme magistrate is still more heinous: but to offend the King of kings and Lord of lords, this is worst of all. We may
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say in this case, as Elijah said to his sons, *If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?* 1 Sam. ii. 25.

2dly, No debt multiplies and increases to such a degree as sin does: therefore, says the prophet Ezra, *Our iniquities are increased over our heads*, Ezra ix. 6. Debt is a wasting and consuming thing to the debtor, for this very reason, that it grows and increases upon him: the longer he is in paying the original debt, he contracts so much the more. Sin is a prodigiously growing debt. David could number his days, and that upon his fingers too: therefore he says, *behold thou hast made my days as an hand breadth*, the breadth of four fingers, that's all: but he could not number his sins, which are debts to God; therefore he cries out, *Who can understand his errors*, Psalm xix. 12. If we consider our thoughts, words, and deeds, our omissions and commissions, how long is our account! how large will our bill be! what we call little sins, do, by their vast multitude, oppress and sink the soul as far in debt as other sins do by their magnitude and heinous nature. The progress in sin is something like that in arithmetic, where the first figure stands for one, the next for ten, the third for an hundred, &c. When you get over one sin, the next becomes easier, and so more heinous; the third easier still, and therefore still more heinous. If there is but a little piece of the dyke broke down, it is easier to pass over it than when it stood entire. The least sin makes a gap in the conscience, and every succeeding one makes the gap still wider, till at length the conscience becomes like a common causeway, or like a city broken down

down and without walls, thro' which the whole army of the enemy may pass and repass at pleasure.

Be not deceived, then, with respect to little sins: there is no sin little absolutely, but only comparatively: and the least sin admitted and indulged, may be called *Gad, for a troop cometh*. A slip of the foot on the top of a precipice, will hurry one down to the foot before one is aware. The serpent will wriggle itself in at a small crevice: and one leak in the ship will let in as much water, by little and little, as will sink her to the bottom. What lighter than a grain of sand? yet a heap of sand, which is but so many grains collected, will bury a man alive.

3dly, In other debts men are fixed to a day for payment by bill or bond; so that, till that day come, the debtor is quite secure, and has nothing to fear from his creditor. But in the debt of sin it is quite otherwise: sinners have not one moment's security from the arrests of God's serjeant, death: yea, oftentimes they are seized suddenly, when they are not thinking of it, nor any way prepared for it. Bellshazzer, in the midst of his pride, when feasting, carousing and debauching, is arrested for his debt to God, and sent down to the eternal prison. Aggag crys, *Surely the bitterness of death is past*, 1 Sam. xv. 32. He thought with himself, if Saul, a soldier, saved him alive in the heat of the battle, surely Samuel, a prophet, would not kill him in cold blood; therefore says he, *the bitterness of death is past*. But this prophet had a commission from above, which he was not aware of; therefore was the king instantly hewed in pieces before the Lord in Gilgall. Job observes of the wicked, that *They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave*, Job

xxi. 13. Oh, how amazing is the security of sinners drowned in debt to the justice of God! they cannot at any time say, as other debtors, that their day is not yet come: any day may be their last day; any moment may serve them with an arrest, and confine them to the eternal prison; forasmuch as they have not cleared one article of past accounts, and are daily running new scores, and have never been at the pains to compound the matter with their creditor, though they have many and many times been called and invited so to do.

4thly, In other debts the creditor can seize on the substance of the debtor, and confine his person too; but he cannot reach his soul: the mind is still free. But in the debt of sin, both soul and body fall under the power of the creditor: *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee*, Luke xii. 20. Psal. ix. 17. *The wicked shall be turned into hell*, viz. both soul and body. Our Saviour exhorts us, *Not to fear them which can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but to fear him who can cast both soul and body into hell*.

Poor secure sinner, thou ledest an easy life under a load of debts: thy debt to God never breaks thy rest; though, perhaps, thou could not sleep if thou wert much indebted to men. Thou canst not pay one farthing, nor dost thou ever care or consider how it shall be paid: but thy creditor, long provoked, will at last prove inexorable; and he will avenge himself upon thee to the last drop of blood in thy soul.

5thly, Other debts may be forgotten by some incident or other; but the debt of sin will never be forgotten, unless it be forgiven. God the creditor, has taken an oath upon it, that he will not forget one item

of your account, Amos viii. 7. *The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, or by himself, surely I will never forget any of their works.* God sits in heaven, and marks every sin committed on the earth: besides, he has a depute in every one's breast, that marks likewise; I mean the conscience; so that nothing can be forgotten. Sinners think God takes no notice of them, because he does not presently smite them; but they are quite mistaken: for God has all their transgressions sealed up in a bag, and hid among his treasures, to be brought forth for their conviction and condemnation at the last day. To this purpose, ye have that expression, Hos. xiii. 12. *The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up, their sin is hid:* not that his sin was hid from God, but hid by God: that is to say, it is registrate and laid up against a day of reckoning. That this is the meaning is clear from the foregoing words, *his iniquity is bound up.* As the clerk of the assizes binds up the indictments of malefactors in a bundle, and at the assizes brings them forth and reads them in open court; so God binds up men's sins in a bundle, and at the great day this bundle shall be opened, and all their sins, with their circumstances of times, places and persons, shall be brought to light before angels and men.

6thly, In other debts people may get a protection to their persons, so that they cannot be arrested; which is one of the privileges of the peerage in our nation: but God can arrest a peer as well as a peasant, a king as well as the meanest of his subjects. The greatness and power of some is a great barr upon their creditors, so that they cannot get justice of them. Some are so intoxicate with their imaginary greatness, that they look on the rest of mankind as a distinct species
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from themselves, and seem to think they were made for no other end but to serve them and support their extravagance.

But, before God, all mankind are upon a level: they are great and small compared with one another; but, compared with God, they are *as the drop of a bucket, or as a grain of small dust in the balances*. He shoots his keenest arrows at the proud and haughty sinners, and he never misses his mark: therefore it is deadly dangerous to be his butt. The haughty Babylonish monarch walks up and down in his palace, and, like a fool, talks to himself, saying, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty*. But God seals an ejection against him, and sends his majesty a-grazing, and to have his intercommuning with the beasts of the field.

7thly, Debtors among men may get out of the reach of their creditors, by absconding or fleeing the country. But let God's debtors go where they will, he knows very well where to find them: for all times and places are alike to him; the night and the day, the light and the darkness, the caverns of the earth, and the most public places of it, Psal. cxxxix. 7. *And whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? if I ascend into heaven thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right-hand shall hold me.*

Sinners presumptuously think to elude or evade the judgments threatned against them. But, know ye, that however ye may escape punishment from men, yet ye

shall not be able, by force or fraud, to escape God's righteous judgment. Your foot shall slide in due time: Sooner or later, be sure, your sin will find you out.

Lastly, Sinners discover the temper and way of the worst sort of debtors: As, 1st, Bad debtors can take on and spend very liberally what is not their own: so sinners take on new scores every day. How prodigal are they of the talents which God has given them, as health, strength, riches, time, and the like? They waste God's good creatures upon their lusts. Take but one single sinner, and Solomon tells you he destroys much good. What havoc, then, must a world of sinners make of the good things wherewith God intrusts them?

2. Bad debtors don't incline to look into their debts. Bankrupts dare not look into their count books, because they know all is wrong. In like manner, sinners dare not examine themselves, and commune with their own hearts: Hence they rush into company, drinking and diversions, to keep them from the painful task of giving audience to their own minds, which are full of challenges and convictions. There is no such terrible ghost to an unpardoned sinner as himself when alone: he cannot bear the sight of himself, or of his ways; and ye cannot impose a harder task upon him, than to oblige him to reflect upon his ways but for a few hours.

3. Bad debtors don't love to see their creditor, and will shun every place where they are likely to meet with him. It is just so with sinners; they are haters of God, and say unto him, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* They hate his word, and they hate his ordinances where he is to be

be found: and if at any time they attend them, their heart is not there; it is a drudgery, not a delight. Like Doeg, they are detained against their wills; and are ready to say, *Behold what a weariness is it? and what profit is there in serving the Almighty?* Ever since Adam run away from God, and hid himself among the trees, his children have been as averse to see God, or have any dealings with him, as ever the most bankrupt debtor was to see his creditor.

4. Bad debtors cannot bear to be put in mind of their debts, and called to payment. In like manner, sinners cannot bear to be put in mind of their duty to God and their neighbour, and to be warned of the danger they are in while in an unpardoned state: therefore they heartily hate the ministers of the gospel as their tormentors, and would wish that there were none at all; or that such as are would let them altogether alone. Tho' they can bear the general preaching of the word, yet, when it is particularly applied to them in the way of admonition or reproof, they are ready to fly in the face of their minister, like chips of wood in the face of the hewer. Ahab says of Micaiah, *I hate him, for he never prophesieth good unto me but always evil.*

I have read (says one) of a law among the Lacedemonians, that none should tell his neighbour any evil befallen him, but every one should be left, in process of time, to find it out himself. Many would be content there were such a law, as would tie up the ministers mouths from scaring them with their sins, and the miseries that attend their unpardoned state. But, alas! when shall we shew our love to the souls of sinners, if not now? In hell there remains no more offices

ces of love to be done for them. Hell is a pest house, that we may not write so much on the door of it, as, the Lord have mercy on them that are in it.

5. Bad debtors are ready to mince or deny their debts, if they can by any means. Thus it is with sinners; instead of confessing their sins in their several aggravating circumstances, as they ought to do, they mince, extenuate and conceal them. And albeit people will confess, in the general, that they are sinners, yet, if ye come to particulars with them, they will refuse the charge, like the Israelites in the prophet Malachi's time. The Lord says to them by the prophet, *Ye have robbed me:* but they reply, *Wherein have we robbed thee? what have we spoken so much against thee?* Mal. iii. 8, 13. As I'm a sinner, is a word common enough in the mouths of those whose hearts were never to this day touched with a sense of sin: but to acknowledge sincerely before the Lord, in the several particulars wherewith we stand charged, and to take shame to ourselves upon the account of them, must be the effect of a day of power from on high.

Objection. But the publican, whom our Lord justifies, Luke xviii. seems to rest in a general confession; *God be merciful to me a sinner.* Will not the most abandoned sinner say as much? *Ans.* Yes. But then, the frame of his heart, with respect to sin, does not correspond with the words of his mouth; and therefore they are an abomination to the Lord. The poor publican's heart was so overwhelmed with sorrow for his sins, that he could not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote on his breast, swelled with grief, and was ready to cry out, guilty, guilty, to every command

mand of the exceeding broad law. Sometimes the heart is so full, that the person can speak nothing, or but very little; as was the case with this man. And likely it was the case with David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, and took him to task very roundly. All that David says, is, *I have sinned against the Lord*, 2 Sam. xii. 13. At first view, one would think that speech shewed little sense of his sin or sorrow for it: but it was not so: his heart, at that time, was so filled, that he could not get vent to it; like a croud of people thronging to be out at a door and all sticking together. He had at that time the seeds of the 51st psalm in his breast, where he falls to searching and mourning afresh; and is, therein, the most illustrious example of a penitent that is to be found in all the Old Testament.

I proceed to the third point, viz. That though all sinners are not equally indebted, some owing more, some less, yet they are all utterly unable to pay the least farthing.

One of the debtors in the text *owed five hundred pence, and the other but fifty*: yet herein they were both alike, that they had nothing wherewith to pay.

Some of the heathen philosophers maintained, that all sins were alike heinous: but this is contrary to the scripture account of the matter. There we find different sacrifices appointed for different sins; and for some sins there were no sacrifices appointed at all, but the sinner was to be cut off for their heinousness, as murder and adultery. The prophet Ezekiel is called oftner than once, to turn again and see yet greater abominations than he had seen formerly, Ezek. viii.

6. *The servant who knew his master's will, and did it*

it not, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew it not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes: for to whom much is given much shall be required, Luke xii. 48.

Our shorter Catechism teacheth us, agreeably to the scriptures, "That some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others." Those aggravations may arise from persons, places or time. *1st*, From the person committing sin. Thus the sins of magistrates, ministers, masters of families and parents, are more heinous than the sins of those who are in a more private character. Persons of publick character are in a special manner bound to be exemplary in all goodness; and when it is contrarywise, which is often the case, they contract great guilt, like Jeroboam, who is said to have made Israel to sin. *2dly*, From the place where it is committed. Sins committed in a land of light, are more heinous than sins committed in places of darkness and ignorance. People may sin at a cheaper rate in Africa than in Scotland, because the light is come unto us, while they are in heathenish darkness, ignorance and barbarity. *3dly*, From the time when it is committed. Sins committed on the Lord's day, are more heinous than sins of the same nature on any other day, because the Lord has sanctify'd it, and set it apart for himself. Sins after vows and engagements, are more heinous than before.

Many other instances of this sort might be given: but this may suffice to shew us, that some sinners are more indebted than others. But let us proceed unto that wherein they are equal, and that is, that they have nothing wherewith to pay; that none of them can in
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the least satisfy offended justice, or appease an offended God. To clear this, consider,

1st, The party offended, who and what he is; even the great God, *who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who cannot look on iniquity but with abhorrence and detestation*, Hab. i. 13. We may say here, what Eli said to his sons, *if one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?* so great is the distance, so vast is the disproportion betwixt the creature and its Creator, that it is impossible for us, by any thing we are, have, or can do, to clear the debt we have contracted to his justice by sinning against him.

2^{dly}, Let us consider the party substituting himself in the room of sinners, to satisfy divine justice for them, and we will soon be convinced, that we had nothing of our own wherewith to pay. This is none other than the Son of the eternal God, who is himself God over all blessed for ever. Can we suppose that the Father would have given up his dearly beloved Son unto the death for us, if we could have atoned for our transgressions? would the Son himself have been so prodigal of his own blood, as to spill it like water on the ground, if sinners could have made up the matter with God upon easier terms?

Methinks this great truth, that sinners have nothing wherewith to pay, is written with the red lines of the Redeemer's blood. The exceeding sorrow of his soul, even unto death, his amazement, his heaviness, his agony and bloody sweat, and his melancholy exclamation upon the cross, all this, I say, found loudly in our ears, that we had nothing wherewith to pay our creditor; and that if he had not undertaken for

us, we would, without remeid, have been shut up in the eternal prison for our insolvency.

3dly, Let us consider the state and condition of sinners themselves. They were, as the Apostle says, *without strength, enemies, and ungodly*, Rom. v.

They had contracted a twofold debt to the justice of God, neither of which they were able to pay. 1st, A debt of obedience. So soon as the rational creature exists, it is, by the law of its creation, bound to obey its Creator in every thing, to the utmost point of its duration; and no circumstances the creature can be in, can loose or cancel that obligation. But, alas! what ability have we for paying this debt? We are impotent, our work arm is broken; we cannot dig with the first Adam, and therefore must beg of the second Adam. We cannot, of ourselves, so much as think a good thought. But, 2dly, Supposing we could yield perfect obedience for the time to come, what atonement is this for the past transgressions? We underly a debt of punishment; we are bound over to death by the sentence of the law, which saith, *the soul that sinneth it shall die*. Every act of obedience stands for itself, and for no more, let it be as compleat and perfect as you will: even as a tenant's paying the current year's rent does not discharge him from his old arrears.

Now, this being the real state and condition of sinners, I would gladly know, upon what foundation in scripture or reason, the antichristian doctrine of man's merit is built. Surely it contradicts the text, which represents the two debtors as having nothing wherewith to pay. It contradicts the whole strain of the New Testament; yea, the main scope and design of
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divine revelation, which is to depress proud man, and to exalt the grace of God. And if we come to reason, scarce any thing can be more absurd, than the doctrine of man's meriting at God's hand, if one considers the relation betwixt the creature and its Creator, with the necessary results and consequences thereof.

Proceed we next to consider the creditor's kind treatment of his two insolvent debtors: *He frankly forgave them both.* The meaning is, that God frankly and freely forgives sinners returning unto him thro' a Mediator. Concerning divine forgiveness, three things will be the subject of our enquiry. 1st, The ground and foundation of it. 2^{dly}, The objects of it. And, 3^{dly}, The properties of it. The ground and foundation of divine forgiveness, as I apprehend it, lyes in these three things.

1st, The mercies of God. Was not our God merciful in his nature, those who are transgressors could not have the least hopes of forgiveness. But that he is so, the scripture every where declares: yea, it is the great design of divine revelation, to display the mercies of God to mankind sinners. The most glorious declaration thereof, is that which God made to Moses, when he called him up the second time into the mount; he passed before him, and proclaimed himself *the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin*, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. This is truly a most glorious and encouraging proclamation: and to our purpose, we may observe, 1st, He begins with mercy, and ends with justice. He does not say, *the Lord God,*

who will by no means clear the guilty; but, the Lord God merciful and gracious. We say, nearest the heart nearest the mouth. Mercy, it seems, lies uppermost in the heart of God; and if judgment comes in, it shall be in the last day of the assize. Observe *2dly*, How he heaps up and multiplies words, to shew the mercifulness of his nature: but when he comes to judgment, he hastens over it in two short expressions. Mercy is six-fold, judgment but two-fold. Observe *3dly*, The time when this wonderful proclamation of God's mercy was made: it was upon the back of the heaviest provocation that he ever met with from that people, viz. their making and worshipping the golden calf. One would think that any proclamation from heaven about this time would have been full of wrath and vengeance: but *God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts.*

2dly, The merits of Christ. Col. i. 14. *In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.* ver. 20. *And having made peace through the blood of his cross.* The channel cut out for mercy to flow in towards poor sinners, is the blood of Christ. God was from eternity, and still is merciful in his nature; but then, he cannot, he will not shew mercy to the prejudice of justice, righteousness, and truth. Therefore a satisfaction, an atonement was made, and then, *mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace embraced one another.*

In thinking of God's moral perfections, we should beware of separating them from one another, or fixing upon any one disjoined from the rest, as the characteristick of the Deity, as some speak: For the entire rectitude of the divine nature, and of the divine
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procedure towards all his creatures, arises from the harmony and close conjunction of all his moral perfections.

If one conceives of God as all mercy, he infers from it, that he will pardon all sin. If one conceives of him as all justice, he infers, that he will pardon no sin. Now, neither of these inferences are good, because the premisses on which they are built are wrong. God is neither to be conceived of as all mercy, nor as all justice; but as God merciful, just, holy, and true in all his doings. Therefore, if sin is pardoned, it must be in such a way as shall not break the union and harmony that is among all his perfections, but on the contrary, display them in all their glory. If no sins are pardoned, what evidence have we of the mercy of God? how does it appear that he is so? on the other hand, if sin is pardoned without any satisfaction or atonement, how does it appear that God is just, righteous, and holy, and that he hates and abhors sin? where is the honour of his law? where is the authority and dignity of his government?

But now, by admitting a Mediator, on whom our guilt is transferred, all these difficulties vanish; and we behold a beautiful harmony and concord among all the divine perfections.

If it be said, How is it consistent with the justice of God to punish the innocent for the guilty? I answer, There is no injustice here: for, 1st, Christ assumed the same nature with the guilty. It was the human nature that sinned, and it was the human nature that suffered. Indeed, that portion of our nature which Christ assumed, was holy, harmless and undefiled. But then, 2^{dly}, There was no compulsion here; for Christ volun-

voluntarily substituted himself in our room and stead, 3dly, His life was absolutely his own, and he had power to dispose of it as he pleased, Joh. x. 17, 18. This cannot be said of man or angel: their life is God's, and should they lay it down, it is but laying down what is not theirs, and so could not be an atonement: whereas Christ voluntarily gave a life which was absolutely his own, *a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour unto God.* Then, 4thly, When he had laid it down, he could take it up with greater glory to God, and good to mankind: and he actually did so by calling back his soul into his body, and coming forth of the grave.

Thus, ye see, tho' the transferring of merit and demerit among men would destroy all justice, equity and order, yet, in the singular and unexampled case of the Son of God, it stands clear of all difficulties.

3dly, The promise of the gospel revealed unto truth. The gospel says, *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more,* Heb. viii. 12. The gospel says, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,* 1 Joh. i. 9. *Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn again unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.* The compassions of our God inserted that word (*abundantly*) on purpose to relieve poor souls fainting under the sense of their abounding iniquities. Here is abundant pardon for abounding guilt.

Now, my brethren, the ascertaining these two grand points, that God will pardon sin, and upon what terms he will pardon it, is entirely owing to the gospel revelation,

velation, and what we could never have found out by the light of nature. I think, the utmost length that human reason, unassisted by divine revelation, could go in this matter, may be expressed in the king of Nineveh's own words, in his proclamation of a fast, *Who can tell if God will turn and repent.* That God is merciful, is an article of natural religion: but then, that God will actually pardon sinners, and upon what terms he will do it, are points of fact about which natural reason will leave the most inquisitive mind fluctuating in endless uncertainty and anxiety.

We must next enquire into the objects of divine forgiveness.

1. Fallen angels are not the objects of this forgiveness: they are not included in the act of indemnity published in the gospel. But, on the contrary, we find their doom declared there. *And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day,* Jud. ver 6. The gospel further tells us, that our Saviour took not upon him the nature of angels.

And, my brethren, setting the fall of angels, and the fall of mankind, the one over against the other, we may use the apostle's reflection on another occasion, and say, *Behold the goodness and severity of God!* on the angels which fell severity, but towards us goodness.

2. Neither are the damned in hell the objects of this forgiveness: for the wrath of God is fallen upon them to the uttermost, and the treaty of peace with them broken up for ever and ever. Hell is a dreadful prison: we may not write so much on the gates of it,

it, as, the Lord have mercy on them that are in it. Were the least intimation of mercy made to them, how greedily may we suppose would they embrace it? But that is over, and they have a long eternity to reflect upon their folly.

3. Mankind sinners, living under a gospel dispensation, are the objects of this forgiveness, Prov. viii.

4. *Unto you O men I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.* The charge given the disciples by Christ before his ascension, was, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, Luke xxiv. 47.

But here it must be adverted unto, that the remission of sins, through the blood of Christ, is offered freely unto all and every one who hears the gospel; so that they have a right to Christ's remission of sins, through him, which fallen angels have not, nor the spirits in prison; yet the proper, formal and actual object of divine forgiveness, is not a sinner absolutely considered, but a sinner returning unto God through Christ in the way of the new covenant: even as the compleat object of mercy is not just one in misery; for then the devils themselves would be the objects of mercy, for they are exquisitely miserable: but it is a miserable sinner, turning from sin unto God by Christ in the way of faith, repentance, and new obedience. In a word, forgiveness of sin is by the gospel offered unto all without exception: but it is only the believing, repenting, and returning sinners, whose sins are actually forgiven.

As to the properties of divine forgiveness, I say, 1st, It is altogether like God himself, and does not resemble the thoughts and ways of men, with respect
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to those who have offended them. This God himself declares, Isa. lv. 8. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord, ver. 9. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways.* Now it is not God's thoughts and ways of wisdom and knowlege that are meant, but it is his thoughts and ways of forgiveness, as appears from the preceeding verse. We must not measure God's thoughts and ways of forgiveness, by the thoughts and ways of men in forgiving those that have offended them: for, in the *first* place, Men are easily provoked; the little proud worm swells in an instant: *But the Lord is long suffering and slow to anger.* 2dly, Man is a revengeful creature, not easily reconciled: but God is ready to pardon, and stands with his arms stretched out to receive returning sinners, and especially if the offence be great. Men stand long before they will be reconciled, but God is willing to be reconciled to the chief of sinners. Greatness of sins is no bar in the way of forgiveness, if the sinner is but willing to be reconciled, Isa. i. 18. *Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool.* Men will reason thus against being reconciled to those who have offended them; the offence is very great, the affront offered me is intolerable; besides, the offender lay under special obligations to me, so that I deserved much better at his hand. Had God reasoned thus about Manasseh, Mary Magdalen, or the apostle Paul, none of them had ever been forgiven: but his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. 3dly, Mens for-

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giveness is often fictitious; they forgive in words while they retain malice in their hearts, and can never forget the injury done them. God's forgiveness is real and sincere, and there is an act of eternal oblivion past on all the sins he forgives; so that the pardoned sinner is, in the sight of God, as if he had never offended, Heb. viii. 12. 4thly, Mens forgiveness is often retracted, and they break out again into deadly feud and enmity; but God's forgiveness is a deed irreversible, and shall never be cancelled; *The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.* The pardoned sinner may indeed fall under fatherly anger and chastisement; but he shall never fall under revenging wrath: for the scripture saith, *There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,* Rom. viii. 1.

2. Divine forgiveness is of free grace, Rom. iii. 24. *Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.* We cannot purchase a pardon on our own expence; we cannot buy forgiveness of God; we cannot advance so much as the least item in our account, far less can we pay the uttermost farthing: we have not wherewith, for we are not only poor to an extremity, but we are drowned in debt to the justice of God, some of which was contracted in Adam, and some in our own persons. If therefore we obtain forgiveness, it must be by grace, and so God is pleased to convey it unto us.

As to that objection, How can the pardon of sin be an act of grace, when it is in consequence of the full satisfaction which Christ made for sin. I answered it at large already: God the Father was not obliged to accept of a substitution; nor was God the Son obliged to substitute himself: besides, the pardon

is still of free grace to the sinner, as he neither deserves it, nor can give any thing for it.

However, then, vain and guilty men may wrangle about this matter, it is certain, the pardoned sinner will very readily set the crown upon the head of free grace, saying with the apostle Paul, *by the grace of God I am what I am.*

3. Divine forgiveness is universal; I do not mean as to persons, as if all were forgiven, but as to the sins of the persons forgiven. When God pardons one sin, he pardons all, Psal. ciii. 3. Col. ii. 13. *Having forgiven you all trespasses.* As to sins past and present, there is no difficulty: and as for sins to come, they are so pardoned, as that the believer shall not, on the account of them, be liable to revenging wrath, but to fatherly anger and chastisements. This is plainly taught by the Psalmist, Psal. lxxxix. 30, &c. Nor can the matter be otherwise. For if a person, in a justified state, is actually liable to eternal wrath for the sins he commits in that state, then, he must either fall from his union with Christ, which is indissoluble, or else he must be in Christ, and in a state of condemnation at one and the same time, which is absurd. Therefore, when justified persons fall into sin, the pardon already described needs not be renewed: the pardon they are to seek, is the removal of the guilt of fatherly anger and chastisements, together with a new intimation of their first pardon.

4. Divine forgiveness is a deed irreversible: *Whom the Lord loves, he loves unto the end. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.* The person pardoned may and will fall into sins, being yet in a state of imperfection. Such an one may likewise lose

the sensible evidence of his pardon; but the pardon itself remains sure and irreversibile. Satan may accuse him, conscience and the law may challenge him; but he shall never fall into condemnation. The royal act of indemnity past upon him, remains in its full force, and shall not be rescinded.

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of this subject.

1. From what we have heard, concerning the forgiveness of sin, we may infer the great worth and excellency of the Christian revelation. Well might the apostle say, that he *counted all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowlege of Christ Jesus*. And that he determined *to know nothing, save Jesus Christ and him crucified*. That God will forgive sin, and upon what terms he will forgive it, are things which we never could have known without the gospel revelation.

The utmost length that reason, unassisted by revelation, could go in this matter, may be exprest in the king of Nineveh's own words, Jonah iii. 9. *Who can tell if the Lord will turn and repent*. And thus the anxious enquirer is left fluctuating in the most painful uncertainty and hesitation, about a matter of the last importance. But the gospel clears it up, by telling us, that God was in Christ reconciling the guilty world unto himself; and that through his name, whosoever believes on him shall receive remission of sins.

Have we not good ground, my brethren, to cry out, of the monstrous ingratitude of the infidel age we live in, in their rejecting that most kind subsidiary, which we have by the gospel, to the ignorant, infirm, and wretched state of mankind? Should a friend of

yours

yours tell you something which was of the greatest consequence for you to know, and which you never could have known without his informing you, how deeply would you think yourself in his obligation, and justly too? behold this is the case betwixt God and you. But some who will declaim loudly against ingratitude to their fellow men, can indulge themselves in monstrous ingratitude to God and his Son Jesus Christ. But let us who are of the day, be sober, and let us walk in the light while we have it, and rejoice in it, lest it fare with this infidel age as it did with the Jews, whose rejecting of the gospel was succeeded by a removal of it from among them.

2. Let us admire the sovereignty, the riches, and freedom of grace, in forgiving mankind sinners. One would have thought, that of the two fallen tribes, angels and men, the former would have stood fairer for the divine favour than the latter, as they were of a more noble nature, and fitter for service than we. But, behold, his delights were with the sons of men! the Son of God takes the human nature upon him, and in that nature offers himself a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and so makes way for their being re-instated in the favour and friendship of God; while the fallen angels are reserved in chains under darkness, to the judgment of the great day. Let the pardoned sinner say upon this, what our Lord says in another case, *even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

3. I would improve this doctrine in the way of trial and examination. Methinks it concerns every one of you to know if your sins are forgiven you. It is, I am sure, a question of far greater moment than many of these that are most heartily disputed among professing

professing christians: for albeit the safety of your state does not depend on your being assured of the forgiveness of sin; yet very much of your present joy and comfort depends upon it.

Now, if your sins are forgiven, *1st*, You will have seen the evil of sin: like David, your sin will be ever before you. The pardoned sinner is the only true penitent. Others may repent of their sins, because of the evil they bring upon themselves, without any consideration of the dishonour done to God. But the sorrow of a pardoned sinner is more ingenuous, and after a godly sort. Having got the new heart and the new Spirit, then he remembers *his evil ways, and his doings which were not good, and repents in dust and in ashes*, Ezek. xxxvi. 31. There is a two-fold evil in sin. (*1st*,) There is an intrinsick evil in it, that can never be separate from it, which is its contrariety to the holiness of God, exprest in his law: It is the very reverse of God and goodness, and this makes it exceeding sinful. (*2^{dly}*,) There is an extrinsick or consequential evil in it, and that is the wrath of God, and misery here and hereafter. Now, in legal repentance, it is only this last that the sinner sees, or is any way affected with. If God would but break the connection betwixt sin and wrath, betwixt sin and hell, the sinner would gladly, and out of choice, sin on through eternity. But the pardoned sinner sees sin chiefly in the first point of view, as it is intrinsically and eternally evil; and therefore cries, with repenting Israel, take away all iniquity, while others say, take away this death only.

2^{dly}, You will have the greatest abhorrence of sin. This was David's disposition: *I hate every false way.*
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There are some sins which people may have an abhorrence at, merely from their constitution, their education, or the cast of their natural temper. Julian the emperor had a peculiar aversion at drunkenness and stage plays; yet he was a very bad man. But he whose sins are forgiven, hates every false way; he has a horror of the least sin, yea of the least appearance of sin, as well as of great and heinous sins: therefore he walks humbly, watchfully, and circumspectly, lest he fall again into the mire. Reproaches, afflictions and persecutions he can bear, as they are cleanly crosses; but sin is the terror and horror of his soul. Chrysostom bade tell the Empress who threatened terrible things against him, that he feared nothing but sin.

3dly, You will have high thoughts of the love, grace and mercy of God, displayed in the forgiveness of sins. You will join issue with Micah in his rapture of holy admiration, Micah vii. 18. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.* The work of redemption appears in a beautiful and glorious light to the pardoned sinner. Such an one loves to think on free grace, and to speak on it, and to hear it spoken of. That doctrine will never be stale, dry and sapless to the pardoned sinner. Such an one often thinks, and says within himself, Oh how much am I indebted to free grace? how shall I shew forth the praises thereof? I was once a dog under the table, but now I am set among the children at the table. I was once a bramble and scrub in the wilderness, but now I am a fruit bearing branch in the Lord's vine-

vineyard; *for his mercy endureth for ever, for his grace faileth never.* That's still the burden of the pardoned man's song.

4thly, You will be disposed to forgive others who have offended you. *For if you forgive not others their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.* A malicious and revengeful spirit is the very opposite of the spirit of the gospel, and makes a most odious appearance in a christian.

How unbecoming is it for that servant, to whom his master has forgiven ten thousand talents, to take his fellow servant by the throat who owes him but an hundred pence. Has God forgiven you millions, and will not ye forgive others a few mites? will ye put on bowels of brass and iron towards others, while God has put on bowels of mercy towards you? believe it, my brethren, pardoning mercy meekens and sweetens the spirit of a man; it transforms him from a lion to a lamb, and from a dragon to a dove.

5thly, You will love him much who has forgiven you, Luke vii. 47. Your desires will be after the Lord, and your delight in him; you will say with the Psalmist, *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee?* and with Paul, *For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor height nor depth, nor breadth nor length, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate me from the love of God.* The believer thinks nothing too great, nothing too dear to bestow on him who has forgiven him all trespasses.

4. I would improve this doctrine by way of exhortation unto sinners, that above all things they would seek the forgiveness of sins. But before I press this
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with motives, I would answer a question which naturally casts up here, and that is, whence it comes to pass, that though pardon of sin be the best of blessings, yet there are few, very few, that give themselves any concern about it?

Ans. 1st, This flows from the want of thought and consideration, Isa. i. 3. *My people does not know, Israel does not consider.* Every thing in the creation is serious, and minds its proper business, but man, fallen man, who of all creatures has the greatest reason to be serious and thoughtful. *The Ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but my people doth not know, Israel doth not consider: the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming;* but poor wretched man, though bound for eternity, makes no provision for the long journey.

Oh how amazing are the lives of most men and women! like straws upon a river, they do not go, but are carried. Death, judgment and eternity, these awful scenes, never enter into their heads till death take them by the collar, and hurries them to judgment; and then they begin to howl and to cry, a pardon, a pardon, a thousand worlds for a pardon if they had them!

2^{dly}, This flows from slight apprehensions of sin, and of the wrath of God due to the sinner. Did men see sin and wrath in their own proper colours, they would give no sleep to their eyes, nor slumber to their eye-lids, till they got a sealed pardon from the throne of grace.

Poor sinners, like the silly fishes, grasp at the bait, not adverting to the deadly hook below. Sin, like a

sweet morsel, is greedily swallowed by the sinner; but when the wrath of God, that is always mixt with it, begins to torment and boil it up, oh how bitter is it! how painful and tormenting is it! even like a drop of scalding lead let fall into the eye! then the sinner is sick, and sick unto death, and what was sweet in the mouth, becomes exquisitely bitter, even as gall and wormwood in the belly.

When we speak of the wrath of God, ye are ready to think we exaggerate and magnify matters; and therefore ye are at little pains about a pardon. But ye are quite mistaken: the most terrible things that ever the heart of man conceived, or the tongue of man uttered, concerning the wrath of God, falls infinitely short of its real terror: for who knows the power of his wrath?

3dly, It flows from a presumptuous hope in the mercy of God. Some say, *They shall have peace, tho' they walk according to the imagination of their own heart*, Deut. xxix. 19. They think God is all mercy, and though he has threatened terrible things against sinners, yet they presume that he will not execute his threatnings. This is the refuge of the ignorant and profane. After a long life-time spent in the service of sin and Satan, if you ask them, when they come to die, upon what grounds they hope for eternity, they will confidently tell you, they hope in his mercy. But I beg leave to observe, that this is a hope against mercy, and not in mercy; it is a hope against the whole tenor of the gospel, which tells us, that God out of Christ is a consuming fire; and that the proper object of mercy is not a sinner going on in sins, nor a sinner leaving sin, just because he must leave the world,

world, but a sinner turning from sin unto God in the way of faith, repentance and new obedience.

4thly, It flows from excessive care and concern for the things of the world. The rich man mentioned in Luke xii. had his head and heart so full of projects for this present world, that he had no time to think of the next, or prepare himself for it; and so came of it: for he was arrested all of a sudden, ver. 20. *This night thy soul shall be required of thee.*

When the world gets into peoples hearts, it commands all their attention, and engrosses all their affections, and consumes all their time, so that there is nothing left for God. And therefore we are positively told, *that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him,* 1 John ii. 15. And that whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God, Jam. iv. 4.

5thly, Some are careless about the pardon of sin, because they think it is but repenting when they come to die, and then all will be safe enough. This is a gross delusion, and ruins thousands of souls. Much might be said to expose it. I shall only observe, that it is a taking two things for certain that no mortal can assure you off; first, that you shall have time to repent, and next, that ye shall have power to repent.

1st, Let me ask the presumptuous sinner, who told you that death is to attack you in such a slow and gradual way, as that you shall have time and space to repent before you die? you will not pretend a revelation for it; and there is no room for reasoning or conjecture on this head, as it is a thing altogether unknown to us. Sickness is, indeed, the usual harbinger

ger of death, and tells the patient, that its master, like Jeroboam's wife, standeth behind the door. But does not this king of terrors many and many a time come up suddenly without the ceremony of a harbinger? does not death often come upon sinners, like officers upon a house full of thieves, who are making very merry, and dividing the spoil; and behold they are all committed to prison together? now, this may be your fate, for any thing ye know to the contrary: you may be struck down in a moment, without having liberty to cry, God have mercy on my soul; and then where is your promised repentance?

2dly, Allowing you have time to repent, who assured you of power to repent? what if you are delirious and insensible? what if you are so weighted with sickness and pain, as that you can neither speak nor think? nay, supposing none of these things were to happen, how do you know that God will give you grace to repent? is it not more likely, that you will be hardened in sin, by way of punishment for your contempt of his grace through a long life? wicked men do not always die even seemingly penitent: sometimes they are stupid and insensible, sometimes presumptuous, and sometimes in despair.

Let us suppose there were two roads to a city, the one plain, patent and easy, and which never misses to carry safely to the city; the other full of rocks, shelves and precipices, so deadly dangerous, that there never was an instance but one of a person who in that road got to the city, would ye not think the man mad and distracted who would venture upon this way, forsaking the common road. The application is easy. The common, authorised and appointed way

way to the holy city, is the way of faith and holy obedience extent in the course of one's life.

That of a death bed repentance is the deadly dangerous way, insomuch that we have but one single example of safety therein: and I do not know that we can reasonably expect another such, unless Jesus Christ were to be crucified a second time. Therefore my brethren, as you are all bound for eternity, I warn you that you dash not your vessels against this rock. Now, for motives to seek the pardon of sin, consider,

1st, The dangerous state and condition that an unpardoned sinner is in. Why, God is your enemy, and his wrath abides upon you. Ye are the very butt and mark of the Almighty's arrows, and he never misses his mark. Do ye know in what posture God stands in towards you? It is in the posture of a man with a bow bended taking a vizzie, Psal. vii. 12, 13. *He hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death: he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.* And as the Scythian arrows were dipt in poison, so God's arrows drawn against you, are dipt in the red wine of his wrath, which, like poison, will inflame your blood, drink up your spirits, and throw you into exquisite and eternal agonies.

Ye are in the state of condemned malefactors, and worse; for they know, by the sentence of the judge, when their day of execution is to be: but yours, for any thing ye know, may be to-morrow; yea, *this night thy soul shall be required of thee.* Ye are in the state of insolvent debtors, who have all law out against them, and are in hazard of being taken by the neck every moment, and cast into prison. Debt has broke
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many a man's sleep: it is amazing that ye should be secure under such a vast load of debt to God, when you cannot pay one farthing. It is said of Augustus, that when a broken merchant's goods were exposed to sale, he would needs buy his pillow, alledging there was some singular virtue in it, that a man with such a load of debt could sleep upon it. May the Lord save you from resting your heads upon the unpardoned man's pillow.

My brethren, have what ye will, so long as you want a pardon, your state is to be pitied and lamented, not envied: nay, let me tell thee further, unpardoned sinner, hadst thou the empire of the world, and all nations creeping to thy foot, as once the beasts did to Adam, and a lease as long as Methusalem's life, twice told, to enjoy it in, without the interruption of one cloud or cross all the while; yet supposing thee to be one to whom God is an enemy, I would, for my part, chuse to be the beast that carries thee, the worm under thy foot, the toad in the ditch, sooner than thy miserable self; for thou art really miserable while in an unpardoned state.

2. Consider a pardon may be obtained. *There is forgiveness with God that he may be feared*: he is a *God ready to pardon*. What glad news would this be to apostate angels, and to such of the children of men as are now past redemption? They would need no more to make them seek pardon with the greatest earnestness, but to know that it might be obtained.

But there is hope concerning you, who are yet joined to the living: ye may obtain a pardon; the thing is very feasible, very probable, and that upon three grounds. (1.) Christ has purchased a pardon by his

his death and sufferings; he has brought matters to such a bearing, as that God may pardon sinners with all due honour and safety to his justice, holiness and truth. (2.) God has promised to pardon sinners. Hence the proclamation runs, *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon,* Isa. lv. 7. Having therefore a promise left you of the pardon of sin, take heed lest ye fall short of the same: for no promise binds the promiser, unless it be accepted by the party to whom it is made. Do not deceive yourselves in this matter; for the general indefinite promise of pardon will avail you nothing, unless you take the proper method of pursuing your interest in that promise. (3.) He hath sent forth his ministers to proclaim this pardon, 2 Cor. v. 20. *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Has Christ set up his standard among you? have ye the stated means of grace? And does not this say, that the treaty of peace is not yet broke up with you, that God is yet in speaking terms, and even ready to be reconciled with you.

What would the apostate angels and the damned in hell give for your seats in the sanctuary, and the offers of pardon and reconciliation that are daily made you?

3. Consider the vast expence at which the pardon of sin was purchased. However easy and free it be to the sinner, it was a prodigious expence to the Son of God: it cost him not only a journey from heaven to earth, but it cost him his blood. Christ himself
could

could not have purchased a pardon for you, unless he had shed his blood, which was infinitely precious, as it was the blood of God. And now, behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; judge ye yourselves, how ye shall escape if ye neglect so great salvation. *If he that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, by slighting that forgiveness which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

4. God hath no pleasure in the death and destruction of sinners, but wills rather that they should turn unto him and live. This he has declared with no less solemnity than that of an oath, *And he swears by himself because there is none greater*, Ezek. xxxi. 11. He regards the souls which his hands have framed, and the human nature which himself assumed; and it is not a pleasure, but a pain to him, to devote any part or portion of that nature unto destruction. Hence, he gives up with none but such as first give up with him, Psal. lxxxii. 11, 12.

You see then, my brethren, that God is willing and most desirous to be reconciled unto you. And the consideration hereof may answer all the objections that can arise in your hearts to keep you from Christ. Does any say, alas! my sins will never be forgiven, for I am altogether unworthy of such a blessing? I say, the objection is as full of pride, ignorance and nonsense, as words can contain or express. What sinner was ever worthy of pardon? where is the pardoned sinner, man or woman, that will not put the crown on the head of free grace, and acknowledge unworthiness for ever? Alas, my brethren, if pardon
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were to be bestowed on the children of men according to their worthiness, they might all sit down and weep, and that unto eternity, because none of them would be found worthy. But courage and comfort to the worthless family of Adam! the Lion of the tribe of Judah is found worthy, for whose sakes sinners should be pardoned. Does any say, my sins are so great that they cannot be forgiven? I answer, *Ye do err not knowing the Scriptures. Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; yea, he came to save the very chief of sinners.*

S E R M O N IX.

Love to GOD illustrated and enforced.

MARK xii. 30. *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment.*

THESE words are our Lord's answer to the question proposed by the Scribe, ver. 28. *Which is the first commandment of all?* or, as Matthew has it, *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?* Matth. xxii. 35. These Scribes were of two sorts, either civil, such as our public notars, or ecclesiastic, being paraphrasers and expounders of the law. This man was of the Pharisees; and among them was the question concerted which he proposed to our Saviour. *When the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together; then one of them which was a lawyer, asked him a question tempting him.* The Pharisees and Sadducees were extremely opposite to one another; but they both agreed in their opposition to Christ. The cunning and policy of the Pharisees is observable here, in that, though the question was concerted among them, yet but one of them proposes it: if he prevailed, they would all triumph, because he was of their sect; but if he were foiled, as the Sadducees had
been

been lately, they would put it off, and say it was but his own private concert. Some think that this lawyer was one of them that had applauded Christ for his conquest over the Sadducees in the last conflict, and that for a penance he was enjoined by his fellow Pharisees to undertake the following dispute with Christ. This they ground upon what is said in the 28th verse before our text, *and perceiving that he had answered them well.* But however that be, our Lord's answer to the question is full, clear, and plain, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.* In which words, observe, 1st, A duty enjoined, and that is love, which is the opening or letting out of the heart after some good proportionable to itself. If we consider love as it is a habit implanted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, then it is a grace, and the queen among the graces, as faith is the king. Consider it as acted and put forth by us upon its object, and then it is a duty, and such an one as greatly influences all other duties. Love is a cardinal affection; it is, as it were, the master bee, which carries all the swarm with it. 2^{dly}, Observe the object of this love, viz. God in Christ; for otherwise he cannot be our God: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.* God out of Christ is a consuming fire, a dread and terror to the guilty; but God in Christ is inviting, amiable, yea, altogether lovely. Hence it is observable, that the covenant of grace is the frontispiece to the moral law. When God came down upon the mount, to speak all the words of the law, the very first word he spoke was a word of grace; yea, it was the very covenant of grace; *I am the Lord thy God, Exod. xx. 2.* Is the Lord our God any other way than by the covenant of grace;

yea, is not this the exprefs tenor of the covenant of grace, *I will be your God.* 3dly, The manner of this love is likewise enjoined. If we would know how we are to love the Lord, we are to love him with all our heart, and with all our soul. There are two things here, *First*, The extension of parts, the heart and soul, mind and strength, &c. Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, for he hath created it; with all thy soul, for he hath redeemed it; with all thy strength, for he hath preserved it; with all thy mind, for he hath enlightened it. The heart is here put for the will, the soul for the affections, and the mind for the understanding. 2dly, The extension of degrees. Our understanding must think of God; our wills must cleave to him; our love, fear, confidence and delight must be carried out to him, without division or deviation to other things. *Lastly*, We have a powerful motive to the practice of this duty, the loving of God, that it is the first and great commandment: so that while we neglect this, we do just nothing at all. Neither are we to think that the love of God is made the first and great commandment only by the New Testament dispensation; for Moses says the same thing to the Jews, Deut. vi. 4, 5. that Christ here says to the Scribe.

In discoursing further from these words, I would, *First*, Explain the nature of the duty here enjoined, loving of God.

In describing or giving an account of what is commonly called the love of God, there are two extremes which some men have run into, both which ought to be avoided, namely, enthusiasm upon the one hand, and cold philosophy upon the other. Some describe
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our love to God in such a mystical enthusiastic manner, as makes it both unintelligible and impracticable to mortals: of these there have been instances in the Romish church; and there may be some such among ourselves.

On the other hand, some have been so much prejudiced at these enthusiastic heats and fervors, that they have run into the quite contrary extreme, describing the love of God in a manner abundantly real, but quite cold and uninteresting. They have philosophised it so much, as to take it out of the affections, and place it intirely in the understanding, while, at the same time, it is unintelligible to the bulk of mankind, who have neither capacity nor opportunity to understand long chains of reasonings, and so can never in that way be brought to the love of God.

The scripture account of the matter is perfectly plain and adapted to the meanest capacity. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. And I shall, through grace, endeavour to imitate the plainness and simplicity of the scriptures in what I have to say upon the subject.

To proceed then, I conceive there is a sixfold love which we owe to God, as our God in Christ. And,

1st, We must love the Lord our God with a love of benevolence. This is the lowest degree of love, and therefore I begin with it, that we may ascend from it to higher degrees. This is a love we owe to mankind at large, yea, to our enemies; them we are bound to wish well to. How much more do we owe it unto our God, who performeth all things for us, and is our best friend? all those places of scripture, which
express

express the saints sorrow for the dishonour done to God, as also their desires, wishes and prayers for the manifestation of God's glory, and for the flourishing of his interest in the world, are instances of this love of benevolence whereof we speak. We have many examples hereof in the book of Psalms, where the inside of that man is turned out to the view of the church, who was said to be according to God's own heart. Did not that man wish well to God and his interest in the world, who says, *I beheld transgressors and was grieved. Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered, let them that hate him flee before him. Blessed be his glorious name for ever. Let the whole earth be filled with his glory, Amen, and Amen. O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness.* The saints could wish for a voice that would reach many thousands; and if they had one audible to all the world, they would use it no otherways than to be precentors of the praises of God, to call up and begin the song, *O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness.* The last verse of the book of Psalms expresses the warmest love to the honour and interest of God; *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.*

2dly, We must love the Lord our God with a love of the highest estimation. One may be the object of love for whom we can have no great esteem. The love of compassion is often called for, where esteem, value, or honour can have no place; but when God is the object, the highest esteem is due from angels and men, and is still too little, because his excellencies and perfections are infinite: for *who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?*

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We have the faints, up and down the scriptures, expressing their high esteem of their God. Moses, in his swan-like song, Deut. xxxii. 31. says, *For their rock is not as our rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.* The Israelites were very ready to turn aside to the gods of the nations, yet the worshippers of these very gods were ready to acknowledge, that they were no way comparable to the God of Israel. The same man, by way of conclusion to his blessing of the tribes, cries out in a holy transport of admiration, *There is none like unto the God of Jesburun,* Deut. xxxiii. 26. *Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity,* says the prophet, Mic. vii. 18. To the same purpose speaks the apostle, Phil. iii. 8. *Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus,* and do count them but dung or dogs meat, *that I may win Christ.* It is recorded to the honour of Moses, in the New Testament, that he esteemed *the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt,* Heb. ii. 26. A sincere lover of God would not lay all the kingdoms of the world in the balance with him: such an one would rather embrace Christ with his cross, than sin with a crown. Their money perish with them (said the famous Italian convert) who think all the gold of the Indies to be compared with one hour's communion with the blessed Jesus.

If then we would know whether we truly love the Lord, let us consider how we rate and value things, when they come in comparison or in competition with God: for many pretend to this love, who discover the naughtiness of their pretensions, when such things are taken from them as they esteemed above God.

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Give them God and the world together, and they will make a shift betwixt the two; but take worldly comforts from them, and they can make nothing of God at all. Why? Because they never esteemed him as the most excellent object; they never rated him as the portion of their souls. In their hearts, which is the book of valuation, God is not above all, but he is beneath all; he is behind all; he is at the foot of their account; he is not the *imprimis*, but an *item*.

3dly, We must love the Lord our God with a love of desire, Psal. lxxiii. 25. *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides thee.* Psal. lxiii. 1. A Psalm penned by David when he was in the wilderness of Judah, *O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.* Strong and pathetic expressions, which we cannot understand aright without entering into the spirit of him that uttered them. The warmest addresses that ever were made to heaven by the saints, have come from wildernesses, prisons, dungeons, and places of distress; for the Lord grants an enlargement of spirit, as ballast for the confinement and distress of the outward man.

This love of desire carries three things in it. 1st, A desire of communion and fellowship with God above all things. *O when wilt thou come unto me? when shall I come and appear before God,* says the Psalmist. The apostle John speaks of this communion in a way of holy boasting and glorification, 1 John i. 3. Let a soul be brought into the chamber of presence, and admitted unto holy familiarity with God thro' Christ, and that soul will care but little how the world goes, because

because it lives above the world. 2dly, A desire after all these ordinances and means which God has appointed for maintaining communion and fellowship with him, as the word, sacraments, and prayer. In the time of Absalom's rebellion David was an exile; but his banishment from the royal palace did not half so much grieve him as his banishment from the sanctuary, Psal. lxxxiv. 1, 2. He seems to envy the birds that built their nests near to the altar, ver. 3. *The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars.*

Saints and hypocrites both attend ordinances and do duties, but with this remarkable difference, that the former seek God in the duty, and are not satisfied except they find him therein; the latter attend the ordinances, do the duty, and then they think they have done all; but they never enquire after God, nor desire communion with him. The saint, thro' the duty as a mean, gets to rest in God; the hypocrite rests allennarily in the duty, without enquiring after God. 3dly, Distress and uneasiness under the want of communion with God. Job is a lively example of this; *Behold,* says he, *I go forward but he is not there, and backward but I cannot find him. O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat.* The soul, under the hidings of God's face, says with the church in Lamentations, *Mine eye trickleth down, &c.* Lament. iii. 49, 50.

4thly, We must love the Lord our God with a love of delight, Psal. xxxvii. 4. *Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.* Hab. iii. 17, 18. *Although the fig-tree*

shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. When this love of delight takes place, nothing can satisfy the soul, but God himself. The presence of an angel could not satisfy Moses, when the Lord refused to go up with the people. At the hearing of the tidings, the people went into mournings, and no man put on him his ornaments, *Exod. xxxiii. 4.* And Moses protests against the journey unless he had God along with him, *ver. 15.* Hypocrites howl to God upon their beds, as the prophet speaks, but let God cast a bone to them, that is to say, give them some earthly comfort, and that satisfies them: whereas, if God should give heaven itself to the saints, and hide himself from them, they could not be happy. If God should take them up to the magnificent mansions of glory, and say, now enjoy yourselves here, and no evil shall ever come near you, but ye shall not see my face, I will go into a retiring room and tarry there. My brethren, I believe, upon such an intimation from God, all the saints would hang up their harps, and the heavenly mansions would sound with groans and lamentations instead of hallelujahs.

Moreover, the soul that delights in God, delights in all that is God's. Hence there is a delighting in the Son of God; *We rejoice in Christ Jesus*; a delighting in the word; *I rejoice at thy Word---thy statutes are my song*; a delighting in the people of God; *the excellent ones---in whom is all my delight.*

5thly, We must love the Lord our God with a love
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of friendship. God in Christ is the believer's friend, Song v. 16. *This is my friend*: it is spoken in a way of holy boasting and glorification: and the believer is the friend of God, as Abraham is called, Jam. ii. 23. which is a far more honourable title than that of king, emperor, or monarch. The whole intercourse betwixt God and his people is just a league of friendship, made and maintained by Jesus Christ. Now the love of true friendship is very strong and fervent: for as the scripture saith, *A man's friend is as his own soul*, Deut. xiii. 6. And if we love the Lord with this love of friendship,

1st, Our friendship with the world will be broken up, because it is declared enmity against God, Jam. iv. 4. Not that we are to hate men's persons, or harbour malice in our breasts against any; for this is a temper diametrically opposite to the gospel; but we must hate all the corrupt maxims, customs, practices and examples of the world, as also its vain allurements and entanglements. We must look off all these things to the author and finisher of our faith.

2^{dly}, We will earnestly desire communion and fellowship with God. Intimate friends, ye know, are fond of one another's company; and when they are in different places, they will correspond by letters. God, in respect of the immensity of his nature, is every where: but as heaven is the place where he fully manifests his glory to his saints, they reckon themselves absent from him while they are in the body upon the earth, 2 Cor. v. 6. but in the use of the ordinances and means of grace, they keep up a correspondence with their friend within the veil: their hearts are in heaven; their desires and delight are there; their hope

is there; their thoughts and meditations are there: and thither do they send their prayers in the name of Christ.

3dly, We will be tenderly affected with the dishonours done to his name in the world. No man can bear to see his intimate friend abused. Love beareth all things, yet there are two things it cannot bear; the displeasure of God, and the dishonour of God. *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes; because they keep not thy law, Psal. cxix. 136.* This (says one) is more than Adam did in his innocency. Had he been affected with Eve's disobedience, he would not have followed her example, but have said to her, as Joseph to his mistress, *How shall I do this wickedness and sin against God:* or, as the Lord said to Moses, *Let it suffice thee speak no more.*

4thly, We will often speak of him, and commend him unto others; *Come and hear all ye that fear God and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul.* When they ask the spouse, Cant. v. 9. *What is thy beloved more than another beloved?* She launches forth into a particular description of him, and concludes with this, that *he is altogether lovely.* Grace, like the author of it, is communicative of itself; and would share its blessed effects among many others. No person partakes of the grace of God in truth, but would wish all others partakers of the same, Acts xxvi. 29.

6thly, We must love the Lord our God with a love of acquiescence. As the Lord rests in his love towards his people, so they must rest in their love to him. From the moment the soul centers upon a God in Christ by faith and love, it enters into rest, and may sing a requiem to itself, as in Psal. cxvi. 7. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.*

thee. Now, whence had David's soul this rest? how came he by it? why, he set his heart and soul upon God, and so he could not miss it: for, in the first verse of that Psalm he says, *I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications*: And then it follows in the seventh verse, *Return into thy rest*. As if he had said, I have long been seeking rest and could not find it; but I have at last fixed my heart and hope upon a God in Christ, and so I can invite my soul to an undisturbed bed of rest.

I shall, in the next place, lay before you some of the scripture characters and qualifications of the saints love to God, that it may be the easier distinguished from the specious pretences of hypocrites. And,

1st, Our love to God in Christ must be sincere. Paul concludes his epistle to the Ephesians, by praying, *Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity*, Ephes. vi. ult. When our Lord put the question thrice to Peter, *Simon, lovest thou me?* no doubt it brought to Peter's remembrance his three-fold denial of him; and a humbling sense hereof makes the good man not to insist upon the degree of his love, but upon the sincerity of it. He does not say, Lord, I love thee more than all the rest; I could go to prison and to death with thee: but he rests in a humble appeal to his Master's omniscience, *Lord thou knowest that I love thee*, Joh. xxi. 17.

My brethren, there is not a grace comes from heaven but it has its counterfeit on earth: therefore, tho' as some divines observe, love can be hardliest counterfeited of any other grace, yet, no doubt, there have been, and still are, a number of false pretenders unto it. People may really love God, and yet not love him sincerely
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and purely, because their love does not proceed from right motives and principles: they love him not for himself, but for his benefits. The Capernaumites sought Christ very earnestly, yet it was not for himself, but *because they did eat of the loaves and were filled*, Joh. vi. 26.

OBJECTION. But may we not love God because of the benefits we receive from him. *Ans.* No doubt of it. David says, *I love the Lord because he hath heard the voice of my supplication*, Psal. cxvi. 7. But if we love him only for the benefits we receive of him, this is self-love, and not the love of God. God is in himself the most amiable object, as he is possessor of all possible perfections and excellencies, and as such should be the object of our superlative love and admiration. Intrants into religion may be brought to love God from the consideration of his benefits, but as they advance further therein, and come to more acquaintance with God, they will love him chiefly, though not only for what he is in himself. In a word, not to love God for his benefits is monstrous ingratitude: to love him only for his benefits is self-love, and argues unacquaintedness with the perfections and excellencies of his nature.

I should not have wished that person to have succeeded in the attempt, who, in a fit of enthusiasm, is said to have gone through the streets of a city, with water in the one hand to quench hell, and fire in the other to burn up heaven. That man might serve God for himself, and not for hope of reward or fear of punishment. Success, I am afraid, in that attempt, would have burnt up the strongest cords and sinews of religion: for the scripture every where addresses our
hopes

hopes and fears, as the two handles by which our souls are taken hold off and managed: so, what God is in himself, and what he does for us, are two motives to love him, which we must not disjoin or separate, more than we do faith and good works.

2dly, Our love to God in Christ must be fervent. This is intended in the heaping up of words in the text, *All the heart, all the soul.* Cant. viii. 6, 7. *Love is strong as death.---The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.* The fervency of the believers love to God in Christ appears, in that, 1st, They count nothing too much for him. Fervent love stands at no cost nor expence upon the object beloved; it can bestow all it has, or can do, upon the Lord. Abraham is willing to offer unto the Lord his son, his only son Isaac, the staff of his old age, the hope of his life, the child of the promise. David might have had Araunah's threshing floor in a present, to build an altar unto the Lord; but David would needs give fifty shekels of silver for it: for, (says he) *I will not offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which cost me nought,* 2 Sam. xxiv. 24. The same fervency of love to his God appeared in his vast contributions for the building of the temple. He prepared an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, and of brass and iron without weight. The sum of what David offered is computed to be more than any king in the world is worth; and yet when he had done all, he says, *Out of my poverty have I done this,* 1 Chron. xxii. 14. The primitive christians, out of love to Christ, sold their lands, and laid the money at the apostles feet; and

and the converts at Ephesus burnt their magic books to the value of fifty thousand pieces of silver, *So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed*, Acts xix. 2dly, They count nothing too hard for him, I mean, to suffer for him. *What mean ye to weep and to break my heart; for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*, Acts xxi. 13. But may be this was only a flourish of his colours when he knew the enemy to be far enough off: he may yet change his thoughts when he comes to look death in the face: nay, what he said he stands to, in 2 Tim. iv. 6. *For I am now ready to be offered, &c.* He had already laid his head upon the block, and was dead before the stroke was given, not with fear as some have been, but with a free resignation of himself unto it. The first Christians counted nothing too hard for Christ: yea, they rejoiced and reckoned it an honour to suffer the hardest things for his name's sake. And, my brethren, though we are not now a-days called to such hard conflicts as they were inured unto, yet are we called to have the same affections towards Christ that they had, and to consider all worldly things, even life itself, in the same light that they did, when they come to stand in competition with the honour and interest of Christ.

3dly, Our love to Christ must be active and laborious, as was that of the Hebrews, for which the apostle commends them, Heb. vi. 10. *For God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.* Paul laboured more abundantly than any of the rest of the apostles; he planted more churches, preached
more

more sermons, wrote more epistles, and travelled longer journeys than any of the rest. He had done more in opposition to Christ than any of them in the days of his irregnacy; but afterwards it appeared, that where sin had abounded, grace did much more abound. It is likely he loved Christ more than any of them; and so laboured more for him than any of them. It is he who denounces that terrible curse against those who loved not our Lord Jesus, 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

If we are lovers of God, we must be active, laborious, and diligent people; we must be always abounding in the work of the Lord; we must be filled with the fruits of righteousness. We must not turn remiss and indolent, nor sit down on what we have already attained, but must be growing in grace, and flourishing in all the acts and duties of holiness. There should be an ambitious emulation among Christians, to go before and excel one another in every good thing.

4thly, Our love to God in Christ must be constant, like the holy fire upon the altar of old, which was kept continually burning. Observe Paul's prayer for the Philippians, ye that are lovers of Christ, and put it up for yourselves, that your love may abound yet more and more, Philip. ~~iii.~~ 9. and downwards. Some set off in religion with flying colours and top sails, with a mighty flow of affections towards God and Christ; but, having no root in themselves, they endure but for a while: their love cools by degrees, till they fall from it altogether, and so become seven times more the children of the devil than they were before. The love of the world, the love of carnal lusts and pleasures,

fures, carries them off from their first love, and they turn apostates.

5thly, Our love to God must be superlative; that is to say, we must love him above all persons and things whatsoever, Psal. lxxiii. 25, 26. The hypocrite has a double heart, as the expression is in Psalm xii. 2. or rather as it is in the original, *an heart and a heart*, that is to say, two hearts, one for God, and another for the creature, or for any thing else. But the Lord claims the whole heart; *my son, give me thy heart*; and he will either have it all, or none of it at all. A heart divided betwixt God and the creature, is such an heart as that the love of God cannot dwell therein. As she was not the true mother of the child, who was for dividing it, so neither are these true lovers of God who divide the heart betwixt God and Mammon.

Mind what Christ says, Luke xiv. 26. *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.* Not that we are to hate any person, far less our nearest friends; but the meaning is, that when the enjoyment of these comes in competition with the honour and interest of Jesus Christ, we must freely give up with them. Holy Jerom understood this text well, when he said, "If my father should stand before me, my mother should hang upon me, my brethren should press about me, I would break through my brethren, throw down my father, tread under foot my mother, to cleave to Jesus Christ."

Having opened up the nature of the love of God, and assigned the scripture characters and qualifications thereof,

thereof, I proceed, in the third place, to offer some reasons for it, and these shall be two.

1st, He best deserves our love. We are ready to bestow our love upon very undeserving objects; and often when the object is deserving, we nevertheless bestow more love upon it than it does deserve. Our passions generally run out either upon unlawful objects, or in immoderate degrees on lawful ones. But if God in Christ be the object of our love, it is impossible we can exceed in the degree of it: for he is the most deserving object.

1. In respect of what he is in himself. But alas, what a lame and imperfect account is it that we can give of God; for *Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?* Simonides being asked by Hiero king of Sicily, what God was, desired a day to think of it, which being elapsed, he desired a second, and then a third; and at last told the king, that the more he thought of the question, the more he was diffculted how to answer it. And indeed, it is not to be wondered at, that a man who knew not the scriptures could give but little account of God; for though his glory shines brightly in the sun, and sparkles in every star, yet the blind cannot see it, which is the case of all natural men. Nor are the heathen sages excepted here; for the apostle, speaking of them, says, Rom. i. 22. *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*

God is the greatest and the best of beings. Goodness and greatness meet in him, and are sweetly tempered together. He is self-sufficient, and all-sufficient; all perfections and all excellencies center in him; and whatsoever of excellence is to be found a-

bout any creature, it is derived from him as the fountain. Here then, O Christian, is the proper object of love, a God in Christ. Who is like unto him; who in heaven or in earth may once be compared with him! *There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun,* Deut. xxxiii. 26.

2. In respect of what he is and does unto us. Have we not reason to say with the Psalmist, Psal. ciii. 1. *Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies, &c.*

He is our Creator, the Father of our spirits, and the former of our bodies. He is called the God of the spirits of all flesh, Numbers xxvii. 16. A most condescending expression; that he, who hath innumerable myriads of spirits inhabiting the spacious realms of light, should not disown, but acknowledge a relation to spirits so meanly bodied as ours are, in frail and mortal flesh. And David praises him for the curious formation of the body, Psal. cxxxix. 14. and downwards. It is natural for us to love our parents according to the flesh; and will we not love the great parent of the universe, in whom we live, move, and breathe, and from whom we have our beings? He called us forth into being, when we might never been seen or heard of without any diminution of his glory; and he has admitted us into the class of rational intelligent creatures, capable of enjoying himself, which calls for our love and gratitude.

He is our preserver, Acts xvii. 28. Psal. xxxvi. 6.

If he should withdraw his supporting arm from us, we could not subsist one moment. He preserves us in our going out and coming in: he preserves us from morning to evening, and from evening to morning again. He preserves us amidst a multitude of dangers that surround us, and holds our life in his hand, as we hold a candle in a hollow lanthorn in a dark windy night, that is ready every moment to be blown out. We do not know how many times in a day the sharp scythe of death is within an inch of the tender thread of life, yet it is not snipt in two, because he preserves it, holding it in his hand. Whom shall we love, if we love not the God of our life, and the length of our days, whose mercies are new to us every morning?

He is our redeemer; and this is the strongest obligation of all, to love him above all. The apostle John celebrates redeeming love as matchless, saying, *Herein is love, not that we loved God; but that he first loved us and gave himself for us*, 1 Joh. iv. 10. What, is there love in no other instance but this? There is love in many other instances besides this: he gave us our being among rational creatures; herein is love: he preserves us in being; herein is love: he feeds us, clothes us, and gives us sleep; herein is love. But all these instances of his love, and many more than these, when compared with his giving his Son to the death for us, are but as so many twinkling tapers set up before the sun in his meridian splendor: and therefore the inspired apostle, utterly overwhelmed with this instance of his love, cries out, as if there were none other, *Herein is love*, love without precedent, love without parallel. This instance of love
stands

stands single and unexampled in all the annals of time, and will stand so through eternity.

Here then is a threefold cord to bind us unto the altar, creation, preservation, and redemption. Reason, justice, equity, interest, gratitude, plead and demand the chief room in our affections to God in Christ. And reflecting on these things, we should say as that martyr, none but Christ, none but Christ. But,

2dly, He demands our love. Prov. xxiii. 26. *My son, give me thine heart.* God says of the heart, as Joseph did to his brethren concerning Benjamin, *Ye shall not see my face without it.* Nor is this a counsel or advice which we may take or refuse, as we think proper; but it is a peremptory command which we must obey, under the pain of God's eternal displeasure. *My son, give me thine heart.* The son may make intreaties to his father, but it is the privilege of a father to lay commands upon his son. Yet the phrase, my son, imports love as well as authority: and how inexcuseable shall we be, if we refuse to obey God's commands, which are so much for our advantage?

Nay, not only is the love of God commanded, but if we will take Christ's testimony, it is the first and great commandment of the law, Matth. xxii. 38. It is first in dignity, because it commands us things concerning God. It is the first in the order of nature, because the love of our neighbour flows from the love of God, as the streams from the fountain, or the effect from the cause. It is the great commandment in respect of its precedency to all the rest. It is great, because the understanding and practice of it is of the greatest importance to us, as it determines our state before

before God. It is the great commandment, as all the rest are included in it. He who truly loves God, must of necessity be a conscientious observer of the duties belonging to both tables of the law. It is the great commandment, because it is the end of all the commandments, yea, of the whole revelation which God has made of himself unto mankind. I say, the end and design of it all, is to implant in our hearts a prevailing principle of love to God. Hence the apostle says, 1 Tim. i. 5. *Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of this subject.

From the account you have heard of the love of God, two things may be inferred.

1st, That it does not consist in such enthusiastic heats, raptures and ecstasies as some have boasted of. There may be true and solid love to God in the hearts of such as are strangers to these motions; and they may feel these raptures and transports, whose hearts were never yet melted with a sense of the love of God. The stony ground hearers anon with joy receive the word, Matt. xiii. 20. yet it is a sorry account we have of these hearers in the very next verse; *Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.* That true lovers of God have at times transports of joy, is what I nothing doubt; but then I would by no means make these infallible criterions or evidences of the love of God; for then we would condemn numbers of the generati-

on of the righteous, and we would lay soft pillows under the heads of many hypocrites.

2dly, Neither is it consistent with a cold stoical unconcernedness about God and the things of God. Some have been so much prejudiced at pretended raptures and ecstasies in the love of God, that they have turned it out of the affections altogether, and placed it in the understanding, establishing the love of God absolutely upon the principles of reason. The text strikes against this extreme, when it calls us to love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Secondly, Methinks the doctrine of the love of God may be improved for our conviction and humiliation before the Lord. The old complaint may too justly be resumed; *because iniquity does abound, the love of many waxeth cold*, Matt. xxiv. 12. Many never had the love of God, and many who once seemed to have had it, are fallen from it. To convince you, how little of the love of God is among us, consider,

1st, The little love and regard that the most have to the ordinances and institutions of the gospel, the word, sacraments, and prayer. How many can let the Bible ly by them from one Sabbath to another, without ever looking on it: publick ordinances are a burden to them: they say of the Sabbath, what a weariness is it, and when will it be over, that we may buy and sell and get gain? how many seldom or never bow a knee to God in prayer, which is one great mean of keeping up an intercourse with heaven! praying hypocrites there may be; but, sure I am, prayerless saints there cannot be. Ye may as well suppose a living man without breath, as a lover of God without prayer.

prayer. It is the very first work of the new creature, as we see in Paul, *Behold he prayeth*, Acts ix.

2dly, The prevalence of the love of the world. This is the sin of the professors of the age wherein we live, and there is no convincing them of it: they seem to say of it, as Lot said to Zoar, *Is it not a little one?* people with all freedom set heart and soul upon the world, and pursue the business of it as if it were their chief end. Well, where the love of the world is in a person, or in a place, there the love of God is not; for *we cannot serve God and mammon; and if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*, 1 John ii. 15.

3dly, Your divisions and contentions about religion speak a dreadful decay of the love of God among us: for is not brotherly love and concord the very badge of Christ's disciples, John xiii. 35. *And he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?* there has been now, for some years, a formal separation from the church of Scotland by a considerable body of people; but let me ask soberly, what has it done to promote the love of God and our neighbour among us? what has it done towards reviving the life and power of godliness? it has filled the breasts of professing Christians with unaccountable jealousies, animosities and heart-burnings one against another: it has rent from the church several weak but well meaning people, and filled them with prejudices against her: it has set up altar against altar, and made Christ to be preached out of envy and ill-will. Believe it, my brethren, where division is, brotherly love cannot be; and where that

is a wanting, the badge of discipleship is gone, and the love of God along with it.

And alas, what a dismal thing is it for a set of people to be crying incessantly for reformation of this and the other thing that does not agree to their model, while the first and great commandment, the love of God, and the second, which is like unto it, the love of our neighbour, ly utterly neglected!

4^{thly}, The selfishness of the most part, and the little regard had to their neighbour's welfare, speaks them strangers to the love of God. We seem to be fallen into the last times, times of great apostasy, in which men shall be lovers of themselves, making themselves as it were the center, and all things else the circumference.

Our times are exactly such as the prophet describes, Jer. ix. 4, 5. *Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth:* and in the 8th verse, *One speaketh peaceably to his neighbour, but in heart he layeth wait.* Where I don't see the effect, I cannot acknowledge the cause. The love of our neighbour, is the certain effect of the love of God; and therefore, where that effect is wanting, I must say, the love of God is not in that place, nor among that people.

5^{thly}, The general hatred and contempt that tender serious christians meet with, speaks how little of the love of God is among us: *for he that loveth him that begat, will also love him that is begotten.* He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. One of a tender conscience, who scruples at any thing as it is
sinful,

sinful, is like a speckled bird in the world, and is the object of its malice, scorn, and reproach. Such an one is called a hypocrite, a precise affected person, unfit for human society. They say the panther has such an antipathy at man, that it will tear the very picture of a man. So wicked men shew their hatred and contempt of God, by maltreating of the saints, who are images and representations of him.

Thirdly, This doctrine may be improven by way of trial and examination. If Jesus Christ should put the question to us, that of old he put to Peter, *Simon, lovest thou me?* some, who never felt this love in their hearts, would be bold to answer in the affirmative, and would seem to take it amiss that their love should be called in question. What, would they say, not love God! God forbid we should not love him: and yet the scripture marks of the love of God are not to be discerned about them: yea, the tract and tenor of their life is like a banner displayed against God and his Christ. But others there are, who, notwithstanding that they truly love God, are so doubtful and diffident of themselves, that they would not know what to answer. Now to cut off the false pretences of hypocrites, and to satisfy real christians, perplexed with doubts and fears in this point, I shall, from the scripture, lay down some marks of the love of God, by which we may try and examine ourselves.

1st, The first mark of the love of God shall be hatred of sin in all its kinds, degrees, and appearances, Psal. xcvi. 10. *Ye that love the Lord hate evil.* Rom. xii. 9. *Let love be without dissimulation.* What is the proper evidence thereof? it follows, *abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good.* Say then, ye who

to the love of God, how stand ye affected to God's utter enemy, sin? whether is sin the desire and delight of your souls, or is it the grief and burden of your souls? they who truly love God hate sin above all things; and chiefly, because it is contrary to the holy nature and will of God: nor is it some one or more sins that they hate; but, as David says, they hate and abhor every false way: for if we reserve but one sin, and let that be but a little one comparatively, yet it will make such a leak in the ship of the soul, as will infallibly sink it, if it is not stopt. Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel, yet one remained, and therefore Samuel says to him, *are here all thy children?* 1 Sam. xvi. 2. So if you pretend to love God, he says to you, are here all your lusts? is there any thing hid with you in your tent? is there any sweet morsel which you will roll under your tongue? if there be the least reserve, your heart is not mine. Paul was a great lover of Christ, and how he stood affected to sin, let his heavy groan which yet sounds in the ears of the christian church bear witness; *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death,* Rom. vii. 24.

2dly, Keeping his commandments. Christ himself puts the matter upon this footing, John xiv. 15. And the disciple who lay in his bosom, says, *And this is the love of God, that ye keep his commandments,* 1 John v. 3. That is to say, this is the proper evidence, mark and test of the love of God, that we keep his commandments. But alas! who upon earth perfectly keeps the commandments of God? *There is not a just man upon earth that doth good and sinneth not.* How do ye explain this mark? *Ans.* Let the tender christian know that there is a twofold perfection: 1st, A legal per-

fection

fection, which consists in a sinless conformity to the whole law of God: and thus only the saints and angels in heaven are made perfect. But *2dly*, There is an evangelical perfection competent to saints in this life, which consists in an unfeigned respect to all the commandments of God, and a sincere endeavour after universal obedience, Psal. cxix. 6. Say then, how stand ye affected to God's holy law? whether do ye look on it as an iron chain about your leg, fettering you, or do ye esteem it as a golden chain about your neck adorning you?

The hypocrites report of the law, at least of some part of it, is-as in John: but the lovers of God make the same report of his law that Paul does, Rom. vii. 12. *The law is holy, and just, and good.* The ten commandments are like a ten stringed instrument, you must touch on every string, observe every command, otherwise you will never make sweet melody. One says, a good christian is like a pair of compasses, one foot of the compass stands upon the centre, the other goes round the circle. So a christian, by faith and love, stands on God the centre, and by obedience, goes round the circle of God's commandments. *He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me*, says Christ, John xiv. 21. Many have the commandments in their heads, in their memories, and in their mouths; but there is not one tittle of them in their hearts, or in their lives. If you have them not in word only, but also in walk and conversation, then are ye lovers of God.

3dly, Mortification to the world. 1 John ii. 15. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* God and the world are two such contrary masters,

ters, that we cannot serve them both: besides, they are two such capacious objects, that any one of them will take up the heart. If the world has got your heart, it will make it like the inns at Bethlehem; there will be no room for Christ there: and if Christ has got the heart, then the world must go to the stable and the manger.

In fine, my brethren, the love of God, and the love of the world, are like two buckets in a well, as the one goes up, the other must go down. Meantime, this mark is not to be understood, as if all care and concern about the world were to be laid aside; for this is contrary to other parts of holy scripture, which commands us to be diligent in our particular callings, and to provide things honest: but ye must pursue these things always in a due subordination to the chief end of man. Ye may possess the things of the world, but let not them possess you. Ye must keep God in your hearts, and the world in your hands, and but loosely too, that if God take it from you, ye may let go your grip, and not have it wrung and torn from you.

4thly, Love to all the saints. 1 Joh. iv. 7. *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God.* 1 Joh. v. 1. *And every one that loveth him that begat, will love him that is begotten.* People may love souls accidentally, that is to say, from considerations quite extrinsic and foreign to their saintship; but if ye love God, ye will love saints as such, be they otherwise what they will. Ye will love them because ye discern the image of God in them, though they are not of your opinion in every thing, nor yet of your communion. Though they
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be poor and despised in the world, weak in their intellectuals, and peevish in their tempers; I say, notwithstanding these things, ye will love them, and associate with them as members of the same mystical body.

5thly, Doing good to others for Christ's sake, especially to the household of faith. 1 Joh. iii. 17. *But whoſo hath this world's goods, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* If ye love God, ye will love mankind for God's sake, as they were made after his image; and ye will love the saints for Christ's sake, as they are part of his body. Hence ye will be charitably disposed to those that are in need, and supply them according to your ability, and as ye have opportunity; and more especially if they be saints. Christ professeth himself still to be naked, hungry, sick, and in prison, and to stand in need of our visits and supplies. If thou hadst a whole wardrobe of costly apparel, Christ hath more nakedness than all that can cover; if whole barns full of corn, Christ hath more empty bowels than all that can fill. Take heed, then, of an hard unrelenting heart towards them that are in misery, and of a narrow penurious hand; they are inconsistent with the love of God.

OBJECTION. But some will say, I am much under the power of slavish fears, and the scripture says, *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear*, 1 Joh. iv. 18. And this darkens all my evidences. *Anſ.* Ye must distinguish betwixt fear in the love of God, and fear in the lovers of God. The apostle says, *there is no fear in love*, but not that there
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is no fear in the lovers of God. So I say, there is no unbelief in faith; but if I should say there is no unbelief in believers, they would jointly give me the lie. Again, the apostle says, *Perfect love casteth out fear*: but whose love is perfect in this world? No doubt, the more that any is perfected in love, there will be so much the less of slavish fear: but they may be both together in the same soul. If therefore these fears are your burden, and you desire and endeavour to cast them out, then the love of God is in you of a truth, though not to such a degree as it is in some others. Those fears argue the weakness of love, not the want of it. God made the ant as well as the elephant, the worm as well as the eagle. Cesar's image is upon a silver penny, as well as on the broadest piece of gold: therefore be not too much discouraged.

Fourthly, This doctrine may be improved by way of exhortation, and that in the words of the text. *Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*

1st, For motives, consider, It is God who planted the affection of love in your hearts, therefore hath he a most just title unto your love; and ye are guilty of the most horrid ingratitude if ye deny it unto him. Who plants a vineyard, and looks not to drink of the wine thereof? God calls our corn and wine his; and much more may he claim our love and joy as his. Should a valuable friend give you notice he was coming to visit you, and send you before hand a vessel of rich wine, would you grudge to broach it for his entertainment when he came? but would it not be monstrous, if with this gift of your valuable friend,
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you should entertain his declared enemy, and have nothing reserved for him when he came? It is just so here: God your best friend, has implanted the affection of love in you, which is like a rich vessel for his entertainment when he comes; but behold this vessel is broacht for Satan and the world, the declared enemies of God: and when God himself comes, ye have nothing for him but the stale dregs and sediments which his enemies have left. Be astonished at this, O ye heavens!

2dly, The love of God is the first and great commandment, the end of the law, and the fulfilling of the law; therefore without it all other duties will be unacceptable unto God. The call and commandment from heaven is, *My son, give me thine heart*. If you should give all your time to religious duties, all your substance to feed the poor, yea, if you should give your body to be burned, and have not charity, that is to say, the love of God, it will profit you nothing, 1 Corin. xiii. 3. Faith is the king among the graces, and love is the queen that sits at its right hand.

3dly, Love is one of the graces which passes over unto eternity, and shall be exercised there; when faith shall be turned into sight, and hope into enjoyment. Therefore, says the apostle, *Charity never faileth*, 1 Cor. xiii. 8. and verse ult. *And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity*. Will ye not then begin that on earth, which is to be carried on through eternity in heaven?

4thly, If ye love God, all things shall work together for your good, Rom. viii. 28. Prosperity or adversity, sickness or health, poverty or riches, death

or life, all things shall work together for your good if ye are lovers of God. On the contrary, if ye are haters of God, all things shall work for your ruin: your prosperity shall destroy; your table shall be a snare to you; your basket and store shall be cursed; Christ himself shall be a stumbling block to you, and the word of the gospel shall be the favour of death unto death unto your souls.

5thly, Consider the great things which God has prepared for them that love him, 1 Cor. ii. 9. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* Heaven, with all its joys, is prepared for the lovers of God, even as hell, with all its torments, is prepared for his enemies. The white robes, the palms, and the crown of glory, are prepared for them that love him.

Lastly, Consider what a heavy curse is denounced against those who love him not, 1 Cor. xvi. 22. *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.* The word *Maranatha* is a compound of two words, which signify, *the Lord cometh*: and so the meaning is, that obstinate enemies of Jesus Christ shall be cursed from henceforth, even unto the coming of the Lord to judge the world at the last day.

I shall now conclude with giving some short directions how to obtain the love of God.

1. Be deeply sensible of your enmity against God, and bewail it before him, Rom. viii. 7. 2. Fly to Jesus Christ by faith for the removal of this enmity, and making up your peace and friendship with God: for he is our peace. 3. Cry to God earnestly, that
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he would implant in your hearts, by his holy Spirit, a principle of love to God: *For he that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* 4. Make much use of the word and ordinances; in them the beauty, glory and excellency of Jesus Christ are let forth into the soul. As kings and princes send their pictures to those whom they espouse; so God has, in his word and ordinances, presented you with an image and representation of himself, that he may engage your hearts thereby. 5. Meditate much on the love of God and of Christ. 6. Watch carefully against the prevalence of earthly affections. 7. Live much in the view of the unseen world, and learn dying daily.

S E R M O N X.

The Duty of loving our Neighbour illustrated.

MARK xii. 31. *And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: there is none other commandment greater than these.*

YE have already been instructed in the first and great commandment, which is the love of God. The second is like unto it, and falls now to be considered: *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Our Saviour reduces the ten commandments into two, viz. the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; and Paul reduces them all into one, which is love, Rom. xiii. 10. *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* Gal. v. 14. *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, which is this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* If any say, how can the law be fulfilled in the love of our neighbour? is not the love of God the first and great commandment? I answer, the love of our neighbour here is not to be taken as separate from the love of God, but as included in it, or flowing from it; even as the effect flows from the cause. God, whom we see not, will be loved in our neighbour whom we see; he will have us manifest our love to him, by loving our neighbour for his sake. In the words we have, 1st, The duty enjoined, which is loving our neighbour.

bour. 2dly, The manner of this love, or how we are to love our neighbour, viz. as ourselves. 3dly, The resemblance betwixt this and the first and great commandment; *And the second is like, &c.* What is further necessary for explaining this division of the text, will cast up as we proceed upon the subject.

In discoursing upon it, I shall, *First*, Endeavour to state the true notion of our neighbour, or whom we are to understand here by neighbour. We learn from our Saviour's sermon on the mount, that the Jewish teachers had greatly corrupted the law, and particularly, that they had corrupted the general commandment of the second table touching the love of our neighbour, Mat. v. 43. *Ye have heard that it hath been said of old, love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy.* The passage there referred to, is Levit. xix.

18. But there is not one word commanding or allowing us to hate our enemy; that was the addition of the corrupt Jewish teachers. They corrupted the text two ways, 1. By a misinterpretation of the word neighbour, confiningly restricting it to a friend or a relation. 2. By a false inference from it; that because a man must love his friend, therefore he must hate his enemy. For though our friends and relations, and those who live near to us, are our neighbours, yet in scripture, enemies are called neighbours. Thus the Egyptians are said to be neighbours to the Israelites, yet we all know they were deadly enemies to them, Exod. xi. 2. *Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman borrow of her neighbour, jewels of silver and jewels of gold.* But these neighbours, of whom they borrowed, were the Egyptians. The Samaritan,

tan, as our Saviour teaches, was neighbour to the Jew who was in distress and wounded; yet were the Jews and Samaritans enemies to one another. Therefore, by neighbour here, we are to understand mankind at large; and so every man is our neighbour. And as an evidence hereof, it is proper to observe, that the Hebrew word for neighbour in the ninth commandment is the same with that in Lev. xix. 18. Now, neighbour in the ninth commandment is taken for mankind at large, and cannot possibly be taken otherwise, as it can never be lawful for us to bear false witness against any person. And in like manner the object of the love enjoined here, is, every person partaking of the same human nature with ourselves. Not but that we may choose our friends among mankind, and love some more than others, but we must love them all, and hate none of them.

Having seen who is our neighbour, I proceed now in the second place, to explain the great duty enjoined towards our neighbour, viz. love. *Thou shalt love thy neighbour.* Now, that we may see this duty in its full latitude, I would consider it in a twofold view, *First*, To love our neighbour, is to do no harm to our neighbour. This is the lowest sense in which we can understand the precept. *Secondly*, To love our neighbour, is to do him all the kind and good offices we can.

First, To love our neighbour is to do him no harm. And in the general, I call that a doing harm to our neighbour, when we do that to him which we would not have him to do to us, according to that notable maxim of our Saviour, Matt. vii. 12. Now, the negative
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part of our duty towards our neighbour comprehends these things.

1st, We must not judge harshly or rashly of our neighbour, Matt. vii. 1. Rom. xiv. 4. Jam. iv. 12. Surely, we would have others judge charitably of us, and are angry with them when they do otherwise: why then should we not do the same unto them? but this matter should be stated clearly, that we may not mistake, and call that rash judging which is sober and just. If I see one do a thing which is manifestly evil, charity does not oblige me to approve either of the deed or the doer: on the contrary, ye must not suffer sin to ly upon your brother, but reprove him. Nor is it rash judging to pronounce those who are manifestly living in sin, to be in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity: for this is what ministers of the gospel declare every day. If I see a man living in direct contradiction to the laws of Jesus Christ, it is not rash judging to say, the love of God is not in that man: but it would be very rash judging to call such an one a reprobate, and beyond the reach of the grace of God. This would be a stepping up to the throne of God, and attempting to open the sealed books of his decrees, and to read out of them the fates of our fellow men. Rash judging is, for the most part, occasioned by people's different opinions and principles with respect to religious matters. Hence it prevails among none so much as among professing christians, tho' it is a very great scandal to their profession. Many confine their charity entirely to their own sect, and are extremely harsh and cruel in their judging of others, who are in reality better than themselves. They seem to think none are going to heaven, but those who walk in a par-

particular path or lane which they have cut out. My brethren, I wish never to approve of any thing, tho' in the most eminent sect, that is contrary to the precept or example of Jesus Christ. May my soul never come into the secret of those who thrust the Searcher of hearts out of his office, and take it upon themselves, judging of people's hearts, and pronouncing them hypocrites, or sincere, according as they affect them. The devil is the great pattern of this practice, Job vii. 10, 11.

2dly, We must not speak evil of our neighbour: so the apostle James exhorts, *Speak not evil one of another, brethren*, Jam. iv. 11. Some have a malicious pleasure in ripping up the sores of their neighbours, and exposing them to shame. They have not an eye to see, nor a heart to acknowledge, any thing that is good or commendable about their neighbour; but if there is any blemish, they are eagle-eyed to discern it: if there is any sore that would be gently touched, there they tread, and upon that they feed, like wasps and other vermin on a fore-backed horse.

This is far from being the example of Jesus Christ: for when he saw any thing commendable about any person, he was sure to take notice of it, tho' otherwise they were but nought. Of the young man that came to him, mark what is said, *Jesus beholding him, loved him*, see Mark xii. 34.

But is there any harm of speaking evil of our neighbour, if we speak nothing but the truth? *Ans.* What we speak of our neighbour must be consistent with love as well as with truth. Tho' we are to speak nothing but the truth, yet all the truth is not to be spoken at all times, or before every person. Tho' we
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speak nothing but the truth of our neighbour, yet, if we speak it from malice and ill-will, on purpose to defame and make him odious, we transgress the law of charity. Now, we may reduce evil speakers into, 1st, False accusers. These are mentioned in the black roll, 2 Tim. iii. 3. Under this character are comprehended, not only false libellers and false witnesses at law, who teaze and torment innocent people with vexatious procceses; but likewise a vile set of people, who, like their father the devil, are the common accusers of the brethren. Ishmael like, their hand is against every man; rather than want a bad report of a person, they will make one out of their own heads, and lay things to the charge of their neighbours, which they know to be false. Such persons are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, and people in public character, as magistrates, ministers, &c. The malicious heart, and the lying tongue, attacks every character, and poisons every company and conversation where they get admittance, with something that tends to blast the good name and reputation of some one or other. You may shut your door against a thief, and defend yourself from a murderer; but who can screen himself from a false and lying tongue? 2^{dly}, Whisperers. These are mentioned in the black roll, Rom. i. 29. and downwards. These, in the Old Testament, are called tale bearers, Lev. xix. 20. *Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale bearer among the people.* The word rendered tale bearer, signifies a pedlar, which fitly sets forth the character of such persons. The pedlar goes up and down the country, offering his wares at every door, and never ceases travelling till he has sold them off: so the tale bearer catcheth

an evil report of a man at one house, and cannot rest till he is at some other house to tell it again. Now observe how contrary this is to the character of a citizen of Zion, who taketh not up an evil report against his neighbour. He not only will not make up a false report against his neighbour, but when it is made up to his hand, and laid down at his foot, he will not take it up and send it about as the tale bearer does. People of this character raise great commotions in families and in neighbourhoods; and they are the more dangerous, that they do things secretly and under hand, and oftentimes on pretence of friendship. Solomon says, *a whisperer separateth chief friends*; and that *the words of a tale bearer are as wounds, and go down to the innermost parts of the belly*, Prov. xvi. 28. He that takes away a man's good name, kills him alive, and buries him as it were in the open sepulchre of his own throat.

Moreover, my brethren, as we commonly say, were there no reseters there would be no thieves: so if there were no receivers of evil reports, there would be no rehearsers of them. If ye love your neighbour, you will not entertain the malicious whisperer, nor seem pleased at the tale he tells you. David says, *He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house, he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight*, Psal. ci. 7.

3dly, Backbiters. These are mentioned along with the whisperers in the black roll, Rom. i. towards the close, and do the same evil to their neighbour's good name, openly, that the whisperers do privately and underhand. At meals and in public companies, they rail at others, either by mincing and obscuring any thing that is commendable about them, or by aggravating
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and magnifying out of all measure their faults and failings. Thus John Baptist's head is oftentimes brought in a charger at the feasts and combinations of malicious backbiters: when they are merry at wine and good cheer, then, to be sure, religious people must be brought into the conversation, as Samson was brought into the Philistines to make sport to them. The Psalmist complains, that he was made the song of the drunkard.

3dly, We must not defraud, supplant nor undermine our neighbour, 1 Thes. iv. 6. *That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter.* It is strange to consider how differently things stand rated in the word and in the world. In the world, he is reckoned the best man that sees best to his own affairs, right or wrong. To impose upon a neighbour's ignorance or necessity, to over-reach him in a bargain, to supplant and undermine him, if it be done with any thing of art or address, is so far from being reckoned a reproach, that they who do such things, boast and glory in them. But, let us appeal from the wicked world to the holy word of God, and see how such conduct is characterised there: and behold we will find, that the deceitful, as well as the bloody man, is abhorred of the Lord: that false weights and measures, and every sort of false and double dealing, are an abomination to the Lord; and that they who do such things shall never inherit the kingdom of God.

4thly, We must not oppress our neighbour, nor by fraud or violence seize upon what belongs to him. Oppression is a sin that has a multitude of cries against it, and therefore will, sooner or later, be very terribly revenged. The word of God cries aloud against it,

Hos. iv. 1. *For the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowlege of God in the land.* Isa. v. 8. *Wo unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field till there be no place, that they may be placed alone.* Jerem. ix. 4. *Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother.*

The oppressed cry against it, and the Lord has all along had an ear very ready to hear their cry. Israel, oppressed in Egypt, cries and groans, till at length the Lord heard their cries and groans, and avenged them of the oppressors. The tyrant who sunk them down with labour, was himself sunk like lead in the mighty waters. Jam. v. 4. *Behold the hire of the labourers, which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cryeth; and the cries of them which have reaped hath entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabbaoth.* Acts vii. 34. *I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them.*

The world cries against it. The unbiaffed unprejudiced spectators of oppression, will cry out against it, though they have no religion, and will be ready to applaud the justice of God when it is execute upon the oppressors. *When the wicked perish there is shouting,* says Solomon.

Conscience cries against it. Even the conscience of the oppressor himself; it often rises upon him with fearful challenges, and gives him a fearful drubbing bout when the world knows nothing about it. What a miserable night did Darius pass in his palace, after he had put Daniel into the den of lions?

Secondly,

Secondly, To love our neighbour, is to do him all the kind and good offices we can. As the cause is best known by its effects, and the tree by its fruits; so the love we owe to our neighbour will be best understood by condescending on some of its fruits and effects, which I call the duties and offices of love; and they are these following,

1st, Praying for them, 1 Tim. ii. 1. *I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all men.* The expression, first of all, not only says, that prayer is a principal part of worship, but perhaps it may intimate, that the concerns of God and Christ in the world should be the first, and not the last part of our prayers, as they commonly are. The order of the petitions in the Lord's prayer, I think, plainly teaches this, though the most part do not advert to it. The first three petitions are for the public interests of Christ in the world; *Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*; and then follows the petitions with respect to our own particular concerns. This likewise seems to have been the mind of the famous Westminster divines, compilers of our Confession, in their directory for public worship annexed thereto, which you may consult at your leisure.

The prayers of saints are the church's common stock, of which every member does partake; and those who love God, and mankind for God's sake, will pray for the conversion of the ignorant and wicked world; for by this means God would be glorified, and immortal souls saved from eternal ruin. If the effectual fervent prayer of one righteous man avails

vails much, certainly the joint prayers and supplications of many righteous ones would avail more. Let us, therefore, in our addressees at a throne of grace, mind others as well as ourselves: let us mind not only our fellow Christians, but also our fellow men. Some have observed, that in seeking for others they have obtained liberally for themselves.

2dly, We must forgive them injuries and offences which they have done against us. Therefore our Lord says, Mark xi. 25, 26. *And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.* It is accounted a great spirit in the world to be touchy, and immediately in a flame upon the least provocation: but if we will measure greatness of spirit by the scripture, we will find it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression; and he was a king who said so.

Man is naturally a proud and revengeful creature, very ready to offer injuries to others, very unfit to bear any offered unto himself; *But dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,* Rom. xii. 19. God bears a thousand times more at our hands, than we have to bear at the hands of any of our fellow creatures: yet for his Son's sake, he both forgives and forgets our numberless provocations. And how can those be thought to share of this forgiveness, who will neither forgive nor forget the injuries they receive from their neighbours, or those who pretend to forgive injuries, but at the
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same time will not forget them. Surely God commands us to forgive injuries, when he forbids us to harbour malice and ill will against our neighbour, and he has set us an example herein, in that he forgets the sins he forgives.

If it be asked, whether suing our neighbour at the law be consistent with that love and forgiveness we owe unto him? I answer with the apostle, that the law is good if a man use it lawfully. Physic is good on some occasions and in some circumstances; and in others, ye know, it may be as pernicious: so it is with the law. And I judge, that law suits or processes are not inconsistent with Christianity, nor with the particular duty I am recommending, if the following things be duly observed.

1. That they be not commenced for trifles. It argues a litigious, wicked and selfish disposition, to be making court pleas and requiring oaths for every little petty trifle that will not bear its own expence.

2. That they be not commenced but upon a just and righteous cause. Much unrighteous gain has been made under the colour of law and justice, when neither the law nor the judge could be blamed, but the party pursuers and defenders.

3. That we offer peace, and to compound the matter before we go to law. He who loves his neighbour as himself, will propose terms of agreement, or submit the matter to the arbitration of neutral persons rather than go to law. And if none of these is yielded to, he does not forfeit the character of a peaceable disposed man though he should take the benefit of the law.

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4. That we do not harbour malice and revenge against such as we are obliged to go to law with.

3dly, We must honour them: for so the apostle exhorts, 1 Pet. ii. 17. Besides the honour due to those in authority over us, or that are any how exalted above us, there is an honour due unto all men, or to human nature, as it subsists in every individual of the species, let them be never so mean and unprofitable in society. Nay, suppose them to be bad men, we are still to respect them as men: for any thing we know they may be elect vessels; they may be among those for whom Christ died, and in some particulars they may be better than we.

The Jews, we are told, would not willingly tread on the smallest piece of paper in their way, but take it up, lest the name of God should be in it. Whatever superstition was in this usage, apply it unto men, and it is solid religion; trample on no man, as thou knowest not but a work of grace may be there: yea, suppose it evident that hitherto there has been no such work, yet thou knowest not what God designs to work there.

4thly, We must put the most favourable constructions on their words and actions that they will bear. The charity the apostle so strongly recommends, has this property among many others, that *it thinketh no evil*, 1 Cor. xiii. 5. Some are such sons of Belial, that one knows not how to speak to them; they take every thing that is said or done by the very worst handle, being jealous and suspicious of every body: but he who loves his neighbour as himself, thinks well of his fellow men, and is willing to impute any wrong they do him, to inadvertency and mistake, rather

ther than to design : he makes suitable allowances for men's natural temper, their constitution, education, calling and customs. And indeed, would we learn to make these allowances one to another, we would live in far more peace, love and charity than we do.

But it argues a strange malignity of spirit to take every thing by the worst handle ; that when your neighbour's conduct may be favourably constructed, then you will be at pains to put a blot upon it, and expose him.

5thly, We must relieve their necessities as occasion offers. For as the apostle James says, *If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food ; and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be you warmed and filled ; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit ?* James ii. 15, 16. Now the general rules for charity may be reduced to three. 1. Our neighbour's necessity. *Distributing to the necessity of the saints,* Rom. xii. 13. The necessity of some is great, the necessity of others is extreme : some need more, others less. Christian prudence must judge in those cases, and make a difference. 2. God's opportunity, by which I mean the occasions and opportunities which God in the course of his providence lays before us, for relieving our fellow men in want or misery. The apostle speaks of this, Gal. vi. 10. So long as the world is filled with so much misery and distress, we cannot miss frequent providential calls to sympathy with and relieving our fellow men. 3. Our own ability, 2 Cor. viii. 12. *For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* God

has placed people in different stations and characters in life. Those that are rich in this world, are charged to be rich in good works, and ready to distribute to the necessity of their neighbours. These in lower circumstances are not exempted from deeds of charity; but must give according as God has blessed and prospered them in worldly things.

6thly, We must warn, admonish and reprove, in reference to sin. We must warn one another of snares in the way, as fellow-travellers towards Zion; and we must admonish and reprove our brother and neighbour, and not suffer sin to ly upon him, Lev. xix. 17. True indeed, much wisdom and discretion are requisite to the right administration of reproof. The different tempers, education, callings and stations of men are to be considered, and proper allowances made for them. The proper times and seasons for such duties ought likewise to be observed; for if these circumstances are not attended to, the reproof, however well intended by the person who gives it, comes to be an act of very great indiscretion, and to miss of any good effect upon the person to whom it is given. If we saw men running upon a precipice, common humanity would teach us to warn them of their danger: so, when we see men living without God in the world, walking in the broad way that leads to destruction, if we have any bowels of mercy, as the elect of God, we will warn our fellow men, our kindred souls, that they bethink themselves, and turn from the evil of their ways, lest they come to the place of torment.

Lastly, Whatsoever we would that men should do to us, let us do the same to them. This is an admirable

mirable maxim, and would make neighbourhood most comfortable, were it duly observed. Put thyself in your neighbour's circumstances, and then what you would wish him to do to you, do ye the same to him; and what you would complain of as an injury from him, be sure not to offer it unto him.

I am next to consider the manner of this love, we are to love our neighbour as ourself. Now, this is not to be understood as if we were to love our neighbour with the same degree of love that we love ourselves: for this would be impossible. But the analogy betwixt the love we owe to our neighbour, and that which we bear to ourselves, seems to stand in two things.

1. We must love our neighbour with the same sincerity that we love ourselves. There is a principle of self love and self preservation in every creature, much more in rational creatures, as man is. In the exercise of this principle we are naturally very sincere and serious: every man most sincerely wishes all happiness to himself, though, alas! mankind often mistake happiness, or the means which lead thereunto. Now our love to our neighbour must be like that to ourselves in point of sincerity, according to the apostle's exhortation, Rom. xii. 9. and 1 John iii. 18. *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.* Say not to your indigent neighbour, be you warmed and be you filled, and yet not give unto him the things that are needful for the body: this is a piece of cruel hypocrisy; yet how many are guilty of it, of whom better things might be expected? They can lament the case of distressed neighbours in very pathetic strains, and ex-

press the strongest wilhes to have them in better circumstances; yet they never contribute any thing towards it, though it be in their power. Their charity is a labour of the lip only, not a labour of good deeds: they can spare a few words, but not a few pence.

2. We must love our neighbour with the same constancy that we love ourselves. We always love ourselves, and we should always love our neighbour. Christ's love is constant. John xiii. 1. *Jesus having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end.* Our love, in imitation of his, should be constant; and we should likewise continue in all the proper expressions and offices of love, and not weary in well doing, even though we meet with very ungrateful returns from men: for if we act from a right principle we shall in no wise lose our reward.

In the *last* place, let us view the importance of this second commandment, in that it is said to be like-un-to the first. And it is so,

1st, In respect of the authority of it. It has the same sanction with the first. God has interposed the very same authority for the love of our brother whom we see, as for the love of himself whom we have not seen: and therefore neglecting the one, as well as the other, implies a contempt of his legislative authority. It is said in the preface to the commands, *God spake all these words.* He did not speak the first and second commandment from his own mouth, and the rest by a substitution; but he spake all and every one of them; so that they have all the same authority.

2^{dly}, In respect of the comprehensiveness of it.

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As the love of God includes all the first table duties, or all that service we owe to God; so the love of our neighbour comprehends all the duties of the second table. Hence the apostle says, *Love is the fulfilling of the law*, Rom. xiii. 8. and Gal. v. 14. *All the law is fulfilled in one word, which is this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

3dly, In respect of the reward of it. The reward of both is a reward of grace and not of debt. There is a reward in both: the work is its own reward, according to the Psalmist's observation, Psal. xix. 11. And there is a reward for both, even eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

4thly, In respect of the difficulty of it. People think it a natural and easy thing to love God. Who would not love him, say they. But unless the principle of love be implanted in us by the Spirit, we neither can nor will love him. The same may be said of the love of our neighbour: we will never love mankind from a right principle, and in a way acceptable to God, until it be freely given us of God.

And now, I shall shut up this subject in some practical improvement. This doctrine reaches reproof to several sorts of persons.

First, To selfish souls, who confine all their love, care and concern to themselves. They make themselves the centre, and all things else the circumference: if it be well with themselves, they care not who it go ill with: they are not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph, nor for the afflictions of any in the world besides themselves. Persons of this character are ranked among the filthy vermin the apostle says should creep out in the latter days; yea, they are placed

placed in the very front of them, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2. No man is born for himself, either in the natural or spiritual birth; for God has made men in society, with a mutual connexion and dependence on one another: therefore a selfish man is the very bane of society, as well as the reproach of Christianity: he deserves not a place in the world, much less in the church.

Secondly, To those who harbour malice and revenge in their hearts against their neighbour; Eph. iv. 31. *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.* Malice is one of the most vile and barbarous passions in human nature. Was I to describe it, I would take the model from the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians, making it in every thing the opposite of charity; and then I would say, malice suffereth nothing, is most unkind, most envious, vaunteth itself, and is puffed up, behaves itself most unseemly, seeks its own always, is easily provoked, thinketh all evil, rejoiceth not in the truth, but in iniquity, beareth nothing, believeth nothing, hopeth nothing, and endureth nothing. Is not this a monstrous picture! yet how many harbour this ugly serpent in their breasts, nights and days, and months, and years? Instead of letting one sin, they can let many years of sins go down upon their wrath; and when opportunity offers of revenging themselves, they can do it with as much keenness and cruelty as they could have done the day they received the provocation. Of such persons I would say, as Jacob to Simeon and Levi; *O my soul come not thou into their secret, unto their assembly, mine honour be not thou united; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down*
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a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel.

Thirdly, To those who envy their neighbours for every thing they possess better than themselves. James iv. 5. *The spirit that is in us lusteth to envy.* Some think nothing good enough for themselves, and any thing too good for their neighbours, and so they always look upon them with an invidious eye. My brethren, purge out this as a piece of the old leaven; allow the great God to distribute his favours unto others in what manner and measure he pleases, without grudging or repining. If you have the love of God in you, you will likewise have a right and charitable frame of spirit towards your neighbour and all that is his. The mischief of envy is exceeding great: it murdered righteous Abel; it sold Joseph into Egypt; and it delivered Jesus Christ into the hands of Pilate to be condemned to the cross.

Fourthly, To those who rejoice at the calamities of their neighbours. Some are of such a waspish salamander temper, that nothing gives them so much pleasure as to hear of evil befalling others. The breaking of their character, their credit, or their substance, is like oyl to their bones; they take pleasure to hear it, and as great pleasure to rehearse it. Well Solomon says, *He who is glad at calamities, shall not go unpunished.*

Fifthly, To those who, like the Jews, love their friends, but hate their enemies. *If ye love them which love you, and do good to them which do good to you, what thank have you?* But Christ calls you to love your enemies, and return good for evil, blessing for cursing, and prayers for persecution and despite-
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ful usage. You have heard, that the neighbour in my text, is every one partaking of human nature : so that though ye may love some more than others, yet ye must love all, and bear hatred to none.

Let me exhort you, to love your neighbour as yourself. Love all mankind for God's sake, and all the saints for Christ's sake.

1. If ye love not your neighbour, the love of God is not in you : *For he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* Where there is no effect there is no cause : now the love of our neighbour is the certain effect of the love of God, which can never fail ; therefore, where the former is not, the latter cannot be.

2. It is the end of the commandment, and the fulfilling of the law ; so that while ye neglect love, ye do nothing to the purpose.

3. Consider the influence love would have to render society useful and comfortable. It is the want of it that fills the world with thefts, robberies, murders, adulteries, lies and perjuries, covetousness and oppression : so that good men are ready to cry out with the weeping prophet, *O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of way-faring men, that I might leave my people and go from them : for they be all adulterers, and an assembly of treacherous men,* Jer. ix. 2. But were we united one to another in the bond of Christian love, we would look every man on the things of others ; we would rejoice and weep with one another, and so the journey through the world would be much more easy and comfortable.

S E R M O N XI.

The Nature of Unbelief opened up,
and its pernicious Influence upon
Professors of the Gospel, illustrated.

H E B. iii. 12. *Take heed brethren; lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

FROM the seventh verse of this chapter, the apostle presses the Hebrews to improve the great doctrine about the gospel-prophet, by alledging a sad example of their fathers, who refused to hear and obey him in the wilderness, and were thereby kept from entering into the promised land. Great miracles were wrought for them both in Egypt and the wilderness; miracles of mercy and of judgment also, by fire, by the earth opening, by fiery serpents, by consuming thousands of them; all which were evidences sufficient to convince them of the wickedness of mistrusting him. But notwithstanding all the wonders both of mercy and of judgment, they were full of pride, murmuring, rebellion and unbelief; and in this hardened course they continued no less than forty years, until all but two of them, Caleb and Joshua, were consumed. Such were the provocations and temptations of God, that he determined their punishment; the certainty whereof he fixed by an ir-reversible oath, which is the highest confirmation of

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vengeance.

vengeance. The matter sworn was, that they should be so far from possessing, that they should not enter into the promised land, ver. 11. *So I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest.* And if we look forward to the eighteen and nineteen verses, we will find, that the apostle lays their exclusion from the promised land absolutely and wholly upon their unbelief. They were guilty of many other sins: they were proved rebellious, murmurers, idolaters; but their unbelief was the root which sent forth all these branches; it was the fountain from which all these bitter waters flowed; and this being the case, the solemn caution in our text follows very naturally the preceeding discourse. *Take heed brethren; lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

In these words we have, *first*, an affectionate compellation, *brethren*. Those unto whom this apostle wrote, were his brethren upon a natural account, at least, they were his countrymen, he being by birth a Jew; but he here calls them brethren upon a spiritual account, as being interested in the same family of God with himself; and by this compellation he insinuates himself into their affections, that so the caution might be better received. Hereby he likewise obviates any suspicion that might arise in their minds, as if he had hard thoughts of them; and lets them know, that the best of saints had need to be cautioned against the worst of evils. 2. In the words we have a caution expressed: *Take heed*. The original word signifies properly, to see or behold, as that is an act of sense; and to take heed or beware, an act of the mind; so, by an easy translation, *first I see,*
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and then *I take heed*. The word imports a constant heedfulness and circumspection. 3. Ye have the persons concerned in the caution, viz. every individual among the Hebrews. *Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief*. The same expression is used, chap. xii. 15, 16. *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God*. 4. The thing cautioned against which is expressed two ways, 1st, In the principle of it, *an evil heart of unbelief*, and 2^{dly}, In the effects of it, *departing from the living God*. The principle of the evil cautioned against, is an evil heart of unbelief. By the heart here, we are not to understand that part of the body commonly so called, nor yet any particular faculty of the soul, but the whole soul in all its powers and faculties. An evil heart of unbelief, is a very strong expression, and there is certainly more in it than to say, *an evil and unbelieving heart*. This may be said of the best hearts in this imperfect state. There is no man on earth, such a strong and stedfast believer, but he misbelieves ten times for his believing once. An heart of unbelief, then, is a heart that is absolutely under the power of unbelief; a heart that has unbelief as the habitual and prevailing principle of all its actions. And the expression of an evil heart of unbelief, seems to point out unbelief as the efficient cause of this evil: it renders the heart evil to such a degree, that it departs from the living God. It is a sin of the most malignant influence. It is the root of all apostasy and defection from the profession of the gospel. And if it be enquired, why the apostle calls apostasy from the profession of the gospel, *a departing from the living God*, it may be observed, that

possibly the Hebrews did not think that apostasy from Christianity was a departure from the living God. They would plead, that they were not turning unto idols, or idolatry, but that they were returning, as they thought, to observe the institutions of the living God, which certainly the Jewish institutions once were. But the apostle lets them know, that after the revelation of Christ, and the profession of him, they could not depart from, but at the same time they behoved to depart from the living God: and he here calls God the living God, that he might deter them from the evil he was cautioning them against. If unbelief should prevail so far in them, as to make them apostates from the gospel, they would depart from the living God; that is, from the God who lives for ever to take vengeance on them that are backsliders and apostates. This consideration of God's being the living God, is full either of comfort or terror to us, according as we are interested in him. If we have his favour and friendship, then it is comfortable to think, that he who is our friend lives for ever; and if we are enemies to him, as all are by nature, or if we are turn'd to be his enemies after a solemn profession of friendship, let us remember, that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Thus, you see, the same promise that drops comfort and sweetness to the godly, drops nothing but gall and wormwood to the wicked.

DOCTRINE. It concerns the professors of Christianity to take great heed, lest there be in any of them an absolutely prevailing principle of unbelief.

1. I shall mention some things plainly implied in this text and doctrine.

2. Open

2. Open the nature of unbelief, and shew you wherein it consists.

3. Lay down some propositions anent unbelief, which may further discover its heinous nature and hurtful tendency.

4. Inquire into that influence which unbelief has upon some professors, to make them apostates from their profession, and so depart from the living God.

Lastly, Apply.

First, I am to mention some things plainly implied in this text and doctrine. These are,

1st, The professors of Christianity need to be stirred up to circumspection, and a godly jealousy over themselves.

Thus the apostle stirs up the Hebrews in our text, and likewise in the twelfth chapter, verses 15, 16. and he expresses himself much after the same manner to the church at Corinth, 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3. *For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy. For I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.* There is a causeless jealousy and suspicion which some have about their brethren, arising from their own credulous and invidious tempers, which is very hurtful to Christian society. But a holy care and concern about our brethren, discovering itself in warning, and exhorting, and provoking them to love and good works, is very becoming, both in ministers and private Christians.

Many professors, indeed, take this in bad part; they think themselves too good, to have any fears or jealousies

lousies entertained of them either by themselves or others. But such persons are proud, high minded, and fearless; and, for all their confidence, they will fall, when those who fear always stand firm. Therefore, suffer the word of exhortation; take cautions and warnings in good part, and as necessary for you in this dark ensnaring world, tho' ye may be already established in the truth, 2 Pet. i. 12.

2dly, A man may imagine himself to be a true believer in Christ, while unbelief absolutely prevails in his heart. This is necessarily implied in the text. Was unbelief reigning in the heart a thing that presently discovered itself to the person in whom it resides, there would be no need of so much fear, caution and jealousy about it, as the text recommends. But the matter is not so. For tho' unbelief be the greatest of sins, yet the place of its residence, which is the heart, makes for its concealment, especially from those who have no acquaintance with their hearts. Yea, the hearts of the best are such, as that none can discover all that is in them, but he whose prerogative it is to search the hearts, Jer. xvii. 10. Besides, unbelief works inwardly in the powers of the soul, and it may work for a long time before the effects of it be discernible. 'Tis not so with other sins, such as pride, covetousness and revenge: where any of these prevail in the heart, the effects of them are easily discerned. But unbelief may dwell long in the soul, and be working in the understanding, will and affections, long before any effects of it are noticed, either by the parties themselves or by others. And hence it is, that so many are quite mistaken about their state; like the church of Laodicea, they imagine they are rich, and increased

increased with goods, while in reality they are *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*, Rev. iii.

3dly, Tho' a principle of unbelief in the heart, lies very favourable for concealment, yet it may be discovered, and when discovered may be cast out. This is likewise implied in the Apostle's exhortation to the Hebrews. If any of them, upon serious examination, found a prevalent principle of unbelief in their hearts, they were not thereupon to despair, or to think that because they had not the faith of God's elect as yet, therefore they would never obtain it. To think after this manner, is still to harbour the principle of unbelief, and to give way to its sophistical arguments, without admitting the solid reasonings of faith.

4thly, Hence it follows, that it is the duty of every christian to be much employed in the great work of self examination, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. This is a duty from which no christian is exempted, whatever is his station in the world or in the church of Christ. However shining his gifts are, and however high his attainments may be, it is his duty and interest to examine and search his own heart, as well as the weakest and meanest christian; for it is possible that the root of the matter may not be in him, notwithstanding these goodly appearances; and even tho' the root of the matter be in him, yet self examination is necessary for the discovery of those filthy weeds which grow up besides, and threaten to suppress the precious planting of the Lord in the heart.

Secondly, These things being premis'd, I proceed to open

open up the nature of unbelief, and to shew you wherein it consists.

1st, In the first place, in order to understand the nature of unbelief, there are two distinctions of it which we must observe: the first of these is into *negative* and *positive* unbelief.

Negative unbelief is, when men have not faith, or do not believe, tho' they never had the means of grace. Those who do not believe the gospel, are called unbelievers or infidels, tho' they never heard it. So Paul, directing the church of Corinth about their public worship, says, *If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, i. e. Heathens or Pagans, these are said to be unbelievers, tho' they cannot be charged with an evil heart of unbelief, as it is meant in the text.*

Positive unbelief, is the sin of those who hear the gospel, and is committed either by refusing to believe the gospel, or by rejecting the faith of it, after we have publicly professed it, and so departing from the living God.

Some discover and express their unbelief, by despising the gospel, and the means of grace to such a degree, as that they will not take on the profession of it; and, like Gallio, *they care for none of these things.* Others make a profession of the gospel, and are thereupon admitted into the external privileges, but by and by they are offended; they draw back and apostatize; and so their unbelief is expressed in rejecting the truths of the gospel already received.

The second distinction of unbelief, is, into *notional* and *practical*. *Notional* unbelief, or unbelief in the mind,

mind, consists in refusing to admit the gospel revelation, as to the truth and necessity of it, or refusing to apply the same in particular to the soul for its salvation. Some, I say, are so bold as to reject the whole gospel revelation, as a cunningly devised fable. The mystery of a crucified Christ appears foolishness to them: they reckon, that men, by a vigorous exertion of the moral powers of their minds, are capable to please God so as to be accepted of him. Now, this is unbelief in the grossest sense; yet there are many such unbelievers in the world.

But then there are others, in whose hearts unbelief resides in a more refined dress. Those give their assent to the whole gospel revelation, as a truth in itself; nay, they approve it as a thing good in itself and necessary; but they never believe it with particular application to themselves; they will not trust in Christ for their salvation; and they will not believe that the gospel breathes grace and good will to them in particular. They are either careless and indifferent about the matter, or, if they do enquire, they stumble at one of two, either the validity of their claim to embrace Christ, or Christ's willingness to receive them; and such who continue to the end in this way, perish as unbelievers.

Practical unbelief resides in those who profess that they know God, and that they believe in him. Of these the apostle speaks, Tit. i. ult. The pretended faith of such persons does not regulate their hearts and lives. Their lusts and corruptions absolutely prevail against any impressions of God, or the truths of God, that may be upon their minds, so that they are

shut up in unbelief; and this is the case of multitudes who hear the gospel.

2dly, For understanding the nature of unbelief, let it be observed, That the root of it is the original corruption and depravity of human nature. The corrupt heart is the seat of unbelief. It is hatched there, and there it is nourished and strengthened. For, as *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*, so with the heart he misbelieves or mistrusts to his own destruction.

Now, that we may see how much there is in the nature of man now totally corrupted, to produce and strengthen his unbelief of the gospel when it is proposed to him, these things following may be considered.

1. There is ignorance and darkness upon the mind, 1 Cor. ii. 14. The natural man, that is, the man that has all and nothing more than what can be derived from the first Adam, does not discern the truths of the gospel, as they are an expression of the holiness, righteousness, and wisdom of God. He does not see their consistency with the glory of God, nor their tendency to his own good; and therefore, in his judgment, the manifold wisdom of God is foolishness. Now, how is it possible that he should believe the truths of the gospel, while he apprehends them to be the very reverse of what they really are.

2. From this ignorance of the gospel, there arise many prejudices against it. Particularly, there are prejudices, 1st, Against the mysteries of the gospel, unfathomable by the natural understanding. Now, unbelief is the spring and source of these prejudices, and is the cause of men's rejecting these mysteries as
absurd

absurd and unintelligible. But the truth is, it is impossible for a man to be a Christian without admitting of mysteries; that is, believing truths, not because he comprehends them, but because God has revealed them, who certainly would never impose a falsehood upon any of his reasonable creatures. Nevertheless, the prejudices of some against the mysteries of Christianity are so strong, that they reject the whole system, and betake themselves to the religion of nature, as better adapted to their capacities; and yet there are many things in nature, and in the religion of nature, which the acuteſt underſtanding cannot account for: nay, there is ſuch an analogy betwixt natural and revealed religion, that there is ſcarce any conſiderable difficulty caſts up in the latter, but a difficulty ſome way analogous to it will be found in the former, and will be equally puzzling to our reaſon to account for it.

2dly, Against the worship of the gospel. There is a purity and spirituality in it, void of all outward pomp and ceremony, that the vain mind of man cannot away with.

Man is naturally fond of a viſible object in worſhip: hence ſprung the idolatry of the world, ſome worſhipping the work of God's hands, as the ſun, moon and ſtars; others worſhipping the work of their own hands, as the Iſraelites with their golden calf. The Jews had ſuch a pompous ſervice, there was ſuch a ſplendor and glory in their worſhip viſible to the eye, that they could not endure the ſimplicity of the Chriſtian inſtitution. The Pagans reproachfully upbraided the Chriſtians, becauſe they had no temples nor altars, nor ſplendid ceremonies. Hence

Christianity was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness; neither of them believed it.

3dly, Against the precepts of the gospel. They are too strict for them. A religion that would give scope to men's corrupt lusts and passions, and allow them to live as they lust, would soon get a vast number of believers. But the Christian religion calls for the curbing all these vicious lusts and passions which men indulge themselves in, to the dishonour of God, to the ruin of their souls, and to the hurt of the society whereof they are members. It enjoins men to be holy in all manner of conversation; and this the greatest part of mankind cannot endure: hence they reject the gospel, and perish in their unbelief.

3. There is a rebelliousness in the will, and this arises from the prejudices against the gospel that have been conceived in the mind. Hence our Saviour complains of the Jews, Matth. xxiii. 37. John v. 40. *And ye will not come unto me that ye may have life.* He does not by this expression intend only that natural unwillingness which is in all men to come to him, and believe in him, but he points at that particular obstinacy and averseness which was in their wills, arising from their hatred of him and his doctrine: hence they not only did not believe on him, which might have been charged on their natural impotency, but they put forth a positive act of their wills in refusing and rejecting him. And upon this account the guilt of mens unbelief is absolutely resolved into their wills. The truths of the gospel are laid before them in their nature, use and end, with the greatest plainness
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and evidence; and the authority of the great God, requiring their belief of them, is also urged, and they are not only unwilling to believe them, but, by a direct and positive act of their wills, they absolutely refuse to be concerned with them.

4thly, There is an alienation of the affections from God and his truths; and this part of the corrupt nature strengthens unbelief very much: for where there is not the love of the truth, there will never be a receiving of it. Mens affections are, by sin, turned off their proper centre, and are now fixed upon the creatures and their sinful lusts; and when they see that the tendency of the gospel is to part them and their beloved lusts, presently they are offended. They refuse to believe it, as being that which crosses the main current of their affections. The most endearing promises and invitations expressed in the gospel, make not the least softening impression upon their hearts, which are hardened and wedded to their lusts.

5thly, There is in all men by nature an impotency to believe. *No man can come unto me, except the Father which has sent me draw him; i. e.* No man can, by any power or ability of his own, believe on me. By reason of the fall, we are in worse case for religion than any thing else. The natural man may make essays towards several duties, as praying, reading, hearing, communicating; but as for the great duty of believing on the Son of God, he can just do nothing at all; and therefore it is no wonder that unbelief prevails so much in the world. However, this impotency to believe and to do good, is our sin, as well

well as our misery; it is criminal before God, for he made man upright.

Thirdly, I go on in the next place, to lay down some propositions concerning unbelief, which may further discover its heinous nature and hurtful tendency. And, *1st*, Unbelief is a sin of a very old date. It does, if I may so speak, claim the pre-eminence among other sins, in regard of its antiquity, for it seems to have been the first sin of our first parents. The temptation was offered to faith. *Yea hath God said* (says the devil). At this Eve staggered: she became dizzy; and upon that arm she fell and broke it to pieces. The temptation expressly contradicts the divine threatening. God had said, that in the day they ate the forbidden fruit, they should surely die. Satan says, ye shall not die: and so that kind of unbelief, which has the divine threatnings for its object, is commonly called presumption, is likewise of an ancient date, and derives its origin from the father of lies.

Thus unbelief early entered the world, and the world was shut up under it. Other sins are the causes for which God imprisons men, but that they are held fast he makes unbelief the jailor.

2^{dly}, Unbelief is a sin productive of all other sins. It is like the fountain, and all other sins are the streams. While others slay their thousands, it slays its ten thousands. It kills shoals of Adam's children, and lays them in heaps upon heaps, as Sampson did the Philistines. It fills the church and the world with all sorts of sinners; and it crowds the pit with sinners that shall never be released. As faith is the fountain of all holy obedience; so unbelief is the fountain of all disobedience. The pride, the rebellion and murmurings
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of Israel in the wilderness, flowed all from unbelief, as the apostle teaches, Heb. chap. iii. and the more or less of unbelief that is in any of the just, so much the more or less will their disobedience be. It is the different degrees and workings of unbelief, that makes some openly prophane, some hypocrites or formalists, some mere moralists, and others apostates.

Thus, whatever be the denomination of sinners living under the gospel, the denomination of unbelievers agrees to them all: for, though the prophane person cannot be called a moralist, nor the mere moralist called a prophane person, yet each of them may be called an unbeliever. Unbelief is the spring of all turnings aside, either to the right or left hand: therefore, in all your searchings and self-examinations, be sure not to forget or overlook unbelief, else you will do nothing at all. If it be undiscovered and undisturbed in the heart, tho' ye could purge yourselves of all other sins, yet it would presently make your hearts like a cage of unclean birds; it would fill it with all manner of abominations.

But to illustrate this a little further, I will condescend on some particular sins, which flow directly and immediately from unbelief as their fountain.

1st, The great, the heinous sin of rejecting Jesus Christ offered in the gospel, flows from unbelief. Thus the prophet Isaiah, when complaining of the unsuccessfulness of the means of grace in his days, resolves it into unbelief as the cause of it, Isa. liii. 1. and the apostle Paul, Heb. iv. 2. tells the Hebrews, that the gospel was preached unto their fathers, as well as unto them, but did not profit them; and he assigns the very same reason for it with the prophet Isaiah,

Isaiah, viz. their unbelief, *The word not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.* Wherefore did the Jews reject the Messiah when he came to them? how was it that they neither regarded his doctrine, nor his divine mission, notwithstanding the indisputable evidences he gave of the truth of both? Why, all this proceeded from an absolutely prevailing principle of unbelief in their hearts. Yea, we find, Mat. xiii. that when our Lord came to his own country, and spoke and did works among them as never man did, their unbelief came to such a height, that there was a kind of embargo laid upon him; and he was in a manner discouraged from doing any mighty works among them; verse ult. *and he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.* He did some mighty works, but their unbelief flew so full in the face of them, that he saw it needless to do any more such works. Whence proceeds the deism of the age, the rejecting revealed religion, and resting upon the light of nature? Why, it is all owing to the prevalence of unbelief. Whence is it that the greatest part of the hearers of the gospel, though they do not openly reject it, yet they never cordially receive it, they never concern themselves about it more than they never had heard such things? Why, all proceeds from the same fountain, ever reigning unbelief. Now, my brethren, the not receiving or rejecting Jesus Christ offered in the gospel, is the most heinous of sins: there is nothing so provoking to God: and he has testified his displeasure against it, by inflicting the most terrible judgments upon those who are guilty of it: the Jews are witnesses hereof to this very day. Now, if rejecting the gospel be such a great

great sin, what shall we think of unbelief, which is the undoubted parent of it.

2dly, Presumption is one of the wicked progeny of unbelief. I observed before, that the devil, in seducing the innocent pair in paradise, expressly contradicted the divine threatening of death, and made them to presume upon it as if there had been nothing in it. Whence is it that sinners presume upon the general mercy of God, saying, they shall have peace, tho' they walk according to the imaginations of their own hearts? whence is it that they presume upon his patience: that, because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore they believe that it will never be executed? why, all this abominable presumption proceeds from their unbelief of his justice and holiness, by which he cannot but hate and revenge sin upon the impenitent; and likewise from unbelief of that special mercy in Christ, by which alone it is that he can pardon sinners.

3dly, Despair is likewise the native product of unbelief. Cain, Saul, and Judas, and many others, thro' the prevalency of unbelief, have been driven to despair. Any faith or belief that such persons have, is absolutely and immoveably fixed upon the justice of God, and the terrible threatnings of the law; and that, in the eye of heaven, is rank unbelief; and the issue of it, which is the mercy of God, proves it to be so. Now, despair is a dreadful sin, for it is levelled against the free grace of God, which is the remedy of all sin. What then shall we think of unbelief from which it flows.

4thly, Apostasy from the profession of the gospel is one of the bitter fruits of unbelief. This the apostle

tells us plainly. *Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God, Heb. iii. 12.* As unbelief prevails with some absolutely to refuse a compliance with the gospel, so it prevails with others to reject it after it has been received and professed, which is a most heinous sin. Apostates and backsliders are the abhorred of the Lord, therefore take heed unto yourselves; for tho' ye have made, and continue to make profession of the gospel, yet if there be an absolutely prevailing principle of unbelief in your hearts, it will work you up at last into a forsaking of that profession.

5thly, Murmuring under cross events of providence, flows likewise from the prevalence of unbelief. The carriage of the Israelites in the wilderness, is a plain proof of the power of unbelief upon the heart, to make it fret at the divine conduct. They were never reduced to any straits, but they fell a murmuring against God, and his servant Moses: they moved doubts and jealousies about the power of God, saying, *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?* Psal. lxxviii. 19, 20. *Take heed then, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief:* for if unbelief has the ascendant in the soul, and be allowed to judge concerning the conduct of providence, it will give in a verdict to the dishonour of God, and to the discouragement of the christian. It is no wonder indeed, that those in whom unbelief absolutely prevails, should be quite dissatisfied with every part of the divine conduct: for we find the saints themselves, under the prevalence of remaining unbelief, scarce able to bear some parts of the divine conduct towards them.

Jacob

Jacob says, *all these things are against me*; and David in his haste said, *That all men are liars*. Samuel, Gad, and Nathan, the prophets of the Lord, not excepted. The remains of unbelief threw so much mist, dust and darkness upon their minds, that they could not see the kindness and good-will of God towards them in his dispensations.

3. Unbelief is a common sin, and therefore the less regarded among men, but nothing the less provoking to God. It was the common sin among the Jews, but they did not regard it; they would not be convinced of it; but the universality of it was an aggravation in God's sight, as appeared from the event, when the whole nation was involved in the same punishment, even as they had involved themselves in the same guilt. A disease ceases not to be mortal, because it is epidemical; nay, it is the more dangerous. Unbelief, then, is a great sin, and it is so much the greater that multitudes are involved in the guilt of it. It is the great prevailing sin among the hearers of the gospel at this day: they believe not the report; they refuse to credit his word of grace. Some of them are guilty of very heinous sins; sins that give great scandal and offence, and sometimes they are prevailed upon to think of them: but as for the sin of unbelief, in which they have lived, and which has lived and lodged in them all their days, and which is the fountain of all their other sins, they never notice it, notwithstanding all they hear concerning the heinous nature and hurtful tendency of it. My brethren, there is utterly a fault in you in this matter. Ye have not your senses rightly exercised to discern betwixt good and evil, else ye would not think so lightly of unbelief. And let me

tell you, that, think as slightly of unbelief as ye will, the Judge of all the earth thinks otherways of it; and as an evidence thereof, he has said, that *he who believeth not shall be damned*; and when he comes in flaming fire at the latter day, it is to take vengeance on unbelievers.

4. Unbelief is a sin which casts the greatest dishonour upon God. The unbelieving man or woman, charges the Most High with falshood, and makes the God of truth a liar, 1 John v. 10. God has given his record concerning his Son, which is a most certain truth, and is therefore proposed unto faith; and when we refuse to give faith to it, we call it a lie, and so fix falshood upon the recorder. Nay, my brethren, the nature and tendency of unbelief is to make void the scheme of salvation, and to frustrate the whole counsel of God in that matter; for the gospel, which is the alone mean of salvation, is, in the depths of sovereign wisdom, so contrived, as that without faith applying it to the soul, God can neither get the glory he proposes by it, nor can the sinner get any good by it. Indeed, if the case were thus, that the merits of Christ, or the preaching of the gospel should save, though we never believed, never improved it, or walked any way answerable to it, then truly unbelief would not be such a terrible thing as we represent it. But the matter is by no means thus. According to the present state of things, there is such a close connection betwixt faith and the glory of God, betwixt faith and the salvation of the sinner, as that unbelief, which is directly opposite unto faith, must be that sin, which, above all others, robs God of his whole revenue

venue of glory, and robs the sinner of all his salvation.

5. Unbelief is one of the sins which God punishes with the most awful judgments. The church of the Jews, before and after our Saviour, are pregnant proofs hereof. The generation in the wilderness were, for their unbelief, absolutely excluded from entering into the promised land. God entered a *caveat* against them, with no less solemnity than that of an oath. They were doomed to pass a miserable and inglorious life for forty years in the wilderness, and then their carcases were to fall to dung it. And as for that generation which filled up the measure of their fathers, in rejecting the Messiah, ye know what was their fate. Our Lord told them of it, and it came to pass not long after his ascension. Their whole polity, civil and ecclesiastical, was overturned; their city was besieged; their temple destroyed, insomuch that one stone of it was not left upon another; and all this because of their unbelief. Therefore I say to you, as in Rom. xi. 20. *Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear.*

6. Unbelief is that sin, which, above all others, excludes multitudes of the hearers of the gospel from the rest promised therein. Mark xvi. 16. *He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.* As faith is the precise point upon which our salvation turns, so unbelief is the precise point upon which our condemnation turns.

Moreover, when the Lord comes in flaming fire, he is to take vengeance upon them that obey not the gospel. Now, what is the obedience that the gospel

pel requires? Why, it is the obedience of faith; it is believing. This is the only obedience which the gospel requires; and those who refuse to obey it are unbelievers; and as such, God will judge and condemn them at the last day.

It is a sin against the remedy of all sins. And what is this remedy? It is the blood of Christ, or free grace. Unbelief is levelled directly against them; so that the unbeliever cannot, or rather will not be saved. Yea, whence is it that the sin against the Holy Ghost is said to be unpardonable? is it from any defect in the blood of Christ? is it because there is not enough of grace and mercy in God to pardon such a heinous sin? By no means. It flows from the unbelief and impiety of those that are guilty of this sin. There is no sin so great, but God will pardon it upon the sinner's believing in Christ and turning from it; but the nature of this sin is such, that the sinner, wilfully, deliberately and maliciously, rejects Christ and all the salvation purchased by him. So that the unpardonableness of this sin is absolutely owing to the sinner, and not to the God of all grace.

7. Unbelief is the great disturber of the saints peace and comfort while they are in this world. Saints, though they have not evil hearts of unbelief, yet they have unbelief in their hearts in a greater or lesser degree, and this is the procuring cause of all their wilderness provocations, and consequently the procuring cause of all their wilderness tribulations. I know not indeed, but God may sometimes afflict his people out of mere sovereignty, and I think there is something like it in Job's case. Observe what the Lord says of him to Satan. *Hast thou considered my servant*

servant Job, that there is none like him in all the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil, and still he holdeth his integrity, although thou movedst me against him to destroy him without cause. Howbeit, if there be such a thing as God's afflicting his people out of mere sovereignty, it happens very seldom; for he does not afflict willingly. There is generally some particular transgression for which he contends with them; and that particular transgression is either unbelief itself, or some of its fruits. Nay, was it not for unbelief, the saints might have a very heaven here upon earth. But unbelief, though it cannot break the peace, (for he that made it maintains it) yet it frequently darkens the evidence of it; and this throws them into great distress. It is the prevalence of unbelief that makes them frequently cry out, *Has he forgotten to be gracious? is his mercy clean gone? does his promise fail for evermore?* It is unbelief that fills them with jealousies against God, as if in some dispensations he designed their ruin, when he really aims at their good. *All these things are against me,* says Jacob. *All men are liars,* says David. Thus ye see it is a great enemy to the saints. No wonder that they complain heavily of their unbelieving hearts, for they are the source of much sin and much sorrow.

8. Unbelief is such a sin that the oath of God is engaged against it. He speaks against other sins in severe threatnings; but the oath of God is engaged against no sin but unbelief, Heb. iii. 18. The murmurings and rebellions of Israel in the wilderness were very provoking sins; but that which gave them such a height of provocation, as that God entered a
caveat

caveat against them with no less solemnity than that of an oath, was their relation to unbelief.

Thus, my brethren, if ye continue in unbelief, ye shall be as really excluded from the heavenly Canaan, as the murmuring Israelites were from the earthly Canaan. It shall not be in your power to enter into it; for the oath of God shall stand as a bar in your way.

9. I observe, that for as horrid a notion as we generally have of atheism, it is but unbelief in its highest degree. An atheist is one who does not believe a God, a providence, and a future state: and is not such an one an unbeliever? so that a common and ordinary unbeliever among the hearers of the gospel, is a sinner of the same kind with a professed atheist. He has the same principle of sin in him; and was it not for the divine restraint, that principle would be wound up to the height of atheism.

As people do not become vicious in their practice all of a sudden, so neither do any become immediately debauched in their principles. They proceed from lesser to greater: they inure themselves to a disbelief of the promises of the gospel; then they disbelieve the threatnings of the law against sin, and this necessarily leads them to a disbelief of the Lawgiver, and then they commence atheists: they say, at least they wish in their hearts there were no God.

S E R M O N XII.

The Nature of Unbelief opened up,
and its pernicious Influence upon
Professors of the Gospel, illustrated.

H E B. iii. 12. *Take heed brethren; lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

[Second S E R M O N on this Text.]

TH E method proposed was, in the first place,
1. To mention some things plainly implied in
the text and doctrine. 2. To open the nature of un-
belief, and shew you wherein it consists. 3. To lay
down some propositions anent unbelief, which may
further discover its heinous nature and hurtful ten-
dency. 4. To enquire into that influence which un-
belief has upon some professors, to make them apos-
tates from their profession, and so depart from the
living God; and *lastly*, To apply.

The three first of these heads have been fully con-
sidered already. I now proceed, in the fourth place,

Fourthly, To enquire into the influence which un-
belief has upon some professors, to make them apos-
tates from their profession, and so depart from the
living God.

1. Let it be observed concerning such professors,
that unbelief, having always been the prevailing prin-

ciple in their hearts, they never had the root of the matter in them.

They never had any thing of Christianity, but what might be as easily lost as it was obtained. They never went farther in it, than what might well enough consist with an absolutely prevailing principle of unbelief. As for the life of Christianity, whosoever have attained unto it, can never fall from it totally or finally; for unbelief, as to its absolute prevalency, is subdued in them, and a contrary principle is planted in their souls, 1 John iii. 9. But as for an outward profession of Christianity, which people maintain by a form of godliness, they may fall from it; yea, they cannot well continue long in it, while unbelief absolutely prevails in their hearts; for that principle is always upon the growing hand; it is rising higher and higher, until it come to such a height, as that the person throws off the very profession of Christianity.

2. Unbelief prevailing in the heart, gives the loose as it were to all other corrupt lusts and affections that are there. Unbelief has the throne in their hearts: there it sits as king: all the other lusts are its servants, which it commands to go or come as it pleases. Hence, though other sins, as love of this present world, or love to carnal ease, may be the proximate and immediate causes of apostasy, yet it is unbelief that engenders these sins in the heart, and strengthens them to such a degree, as that they throw off that profession of religion which is like to be dangerous to them. Demas forsook Paul, for the love of this present world. But had Demas had a principle of faith in him, it would have subdued his love
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of this present world, and would have made him look for a better and more enduring inheritance in the heavens. But instead of that, he had a reigning principle of unbelief, which gave the loose to those and all his other lusts, that were like to be starved, if he had continued in the profession of Christianity.

3. Unbelief casts all noble and generous principles out of the heart. It dispirits a man, and makes him a downright coward, so that he dares not go forward in the way of religion, but draws back. Hence, in Rev. xxi. 8. The fearful and unbelieving are ranked together, as being near a-kin: fear is the child; and unbelief is the parent. The fearful are those who, having entered upon the way of religion, are so scared at the difficulties and hardships casting up in it, that they dare not go forward. They think it impossible for them ever to get safe to the end of the way; and so they judge it best to draw back in time.

We may judge of the nature and effects of unbelief, by comparing it with its opposite grace, which is faith. Now faith, ye know, is the most bold and courageous of all the graces. It makes a man like another Sampson, both for strength and courage. The saints of old, through faith, subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. But unbelief is a base coward: it makes a man to run when none pursues him; to fear, where there is no cause of fear. Faith removes the mountain, but unbelief raises it; yea it imagines that to be a mountain which is but a molehill. Unbelief says

there is a lion in the streets, and therefore it is not safe to go out; but faith ventures out upon the word of promise; *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder.* Unbelief makes such a report of the good land to the man, as intimidates and frightens him. It tells him of such rocks and mountains, of such lions and leopards in the way, as drives him back after he designed to set forward. But when unbelief whispers any such reports in the saints ears to discourage them, valiant faith steps in, like Caleb of old, and stills them, saying, *Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it,* Numb. xiii. 30.

4. Unbelief centers the soul upon earthly things, and thereby influences it unto an apostasy from christianity, when the profession of it is any way incompatible with these things. As faith raises the soul above earthly things, and opens it a passage unto the holiest of all, where it sees a portion suitable to its nature, and so bears it up under all the worldly crosses, losses and discouragements that may attend the profession of Christianity, so, on the other hand, unbelief confines the soul to earthly things as its portion. It cannot look upwards to God in Christ. It cannot carry the soul within the veil. The unbeliever's treasure lies in the earth, and therefore, when his profession of christianity interferes with it, no wonder if he throws it off.

Having finished the doctrinal part of this subject, I now proceed to the application.

First, Then, this doctrine may be improved by way of lamentation over an unbelieving world, unto whom the gospel is preached. Alas! *Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

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The word is preached, the word is heard; but it is not mixed with faith in them that hear, and therefore it cannot profit them. The gospel is the same now that it was in ancient times; but the temper and disposition of the hearers are not what they have been. An indifference and lukewarmness has seized the spirits of the most part of our professors. The good old doctrine of the cross of Christ, the doctrine preached by the apostles, the doctrine preached by our reformers, is now become so old, as that with many it is quite out of date, and has no favour with them. They have itching ears, are fond of new speculations and fancies; they seek amusement, but not edification; and so the simple, plain, and undisguised preaching of the gospel is foolishness with them.

Nay, infidelity and atheism prevails so much, that bold attempts are made to sap and undermine the foundations of revealed religion. The doctrine of the cross seems to the worshippers of reason, a *cunningly devised fable*, and an imposition upon the world. To others, it is a lovely song, which, though it make some impression, yet that impression presently wears off, and they are nothing the better for it. Vice and immorality, the native product of unbelief, overflows all its banks. The greatest part neither believe the promises of the gospel, nor the threatnings of the law; therefore they go on, Jehu-like, in spite of all ordinances, and in spite of the most awful dispensations of providence, whereof there are not a few at this day. This is the case of the present generation, and it is their unbelief that makes it so.

And what is most to be lamented is, that though unbelief be the crying sin among the hearers of the gospel

gospel at this day, yet they will not be convinced of it. People will not see it to be a sin, at least to be such a heinous sin as the Spirit of God in the scripture represents it. Yea, it is much to be doubted if any among you have been prevailed on to look into your own hearts, for the abominable idol, notwithstanding all ye have heard about it. However, if any of you be destroyed by it, it is not for want of warning.

2. This doctrine may be improved by way of caution, trial and examination. *1st*, Ye who are professors, I would have you take the watch-word in the text. *Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.* Ye may go the round of religious duties, ye may pray in secret, and in your families, ye may read, hear, and sit down at the Lord's table, and yet there may be a dead fly which will cause all this ointment of yours to send forth a stinking savour, I mean the evil heart of unbelief, that will spoil, that will putrify all your duties, so that God will not be able to bear them. Neither think that your long standing in a profession is a sufficient evidence that ye have not an evil heart of unbelief; for unbelief being lodged in the heart, may be concealed in it for a long time, and may be working very powerfully tho' ye perceive it not. *2^{dly}*, Real believers, ye are also concerned in this matter: for tho' ye have not an evil heart of unbelief, yet there is much unbelief in your hearts. None of you believes so strongly, so steadily and constantly as you should do. If ye think ye do, it is a plain symptom that you have no faith at all. Those who complain most of their unbelieving hearts, are the best believers. That man understood the nature

ture of faith, and had a great deal of it, who said, *Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief.*

Wherefore, believers, I caution you against unbelief. Beware of the very first motions of it. Listen not to this whisperer, lest he separate betwixt you and your best friend. It is a sin of the most malignant influence of any whatsoever; therefore the least degree of it is dangerous.

Quest. But how shall we distinguish betwixt unbelief in the heart, and an evil heart of unbelief? This question I would solve for the sake of real believers, for they are the only persons who enquire into these matters; and when they feel unbelief working in their hearts, they are apt to suspect that they are utterly destitute of saving faith, and that they have an evil heart of unbelief.

I. In the general, let it be observed, That there is unbelief in the heart of the strongest and steadiest believers so long as they are in the world. But the evil heart of unbelief subsists only in such as never yet believed unto the saving of their souls. We must distinguish betwixt doing a thing in unbelief, and doing it not without a mixture of unbelief. It is one of the adorable depths of the divine wisdom, that the sanctification of believers is not perfected until death. Hence, though they be sanctified in every part, soul, body and spirit, yet they are compleatly sanctified in no part. They are split into flesh and spirit, into an old man and a new man: there is a piece of remaining corruption to oppose every grace of the spirit. Hence there is a remainder of unbelief to oppose the actings of faith; there is a remainder of hypocrisy to oppose the grace of

of sincerity ; so that the strongest believer must cry, with the man in the gospel, for help against his unbelief, and with the apostles, Luke xvii. 5. But the question still returns, viz. How shall I know whether the unbelief in my heart be the absolutely prevailing principle there, or only such a remainder of it as is consistent with a gracious state thereafter.

2. When unbelief absolutely prevails in the heart, the person has no sense or feeling of it ; whereas a gracious person feels the workings of unbelief in his heart, complains of them, and mourns over them before the Lord. It is indeed possible that hypocrites, when they take a religious fit, and have their affections moved, may complain of unbelief as if they really felt it. But sure I am, a solid and abiding sense and feeling of the workings of unbelief will be found in none in whom it absolutely prevails ; for this feeling is the very fruit of faith, and cannot be where there is no faith, more than smoke can be where there is no fire, or motion where there is no life.

3. Where unbelief absolutely prevails in the heart, it meets with no opposition ; whereas the man who has a principle of faith, constantly opposes, struggles and fights against the remainder of unbelief in his heart. Hence the apostle says, *The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh ; and these are contrary the one to the other*, Gal. v. 17. Abraham was so great a believer, that he was honoured with the title of the father of the faithful : his faith was made the pattern of the faith of the church in all ages ; yet in the promise of a son to him he struggled with unbelief ; for it is said, that against hope he believed in hope, that he might become the father

father of many nations. His unbelief flew in the face of the promise, and produced very strong reasonings against the completion of it, viz. his own advanced years, and the deadness of Sarah's womb. But his faith not only opposed but overcame the reasonings of unbelief; and the victory of faith was so much the more glorious, that it was over such a powerful antagonist as unbelief, Rom. iv. 18, 19, 20. Therefore, my brethren, if there be a principle in your souls that struggles and fights against the workings of unbelief, and that not by fits and starts, but habitually and constantly, it is no other than a principle of faith, and consequently unbelief does not absolutely prevail over you. Do not ye sometimes feel unbelief rising against the promises of God, and against the providence of God; and in that case are ye exercised as Abraham was, hoping against hope, and believing over the belly of unbelief, crying to the Lord that he would help your unbelief, and increase your faith: are ye saying with Job, *Though he should slay me yet will I trust in him?* That man, ye see, resolves to fight against unbelief to the very last drop of his blood; as if he had said, The Lord's hand is very sore out against me, and unbelief triumphs over me, saying, where is his mercy, where is his promise? The dispensations of his providence are a downright contradiction to it, but I will not yield it; I will hang by my God; yea, though he should put forth his hand and slay me outright, yet will I die in the faith of his promise.

4. When unbelief absolutely prevails in the heart, there is no abiding love to Jesus Christ in it: where-

as, when a man has a principle of faith, it worketh by love, both to the head, and to the members, notwithstanding the remains of unbelief. Peter was a believer in Christ, and consequently a lover of Christ; and though unbelief did not prevail absolutely over him, so as to expel his faith and love totally, yet it prevailed very far, and would have prevailed to the last degree, had it not been Christ's prayer on his behalf, that his faith might not fail, Luke xxii. 31, 32. Now, this man's denial of his Master did not flow from his want of faith in him as the Messiah; it flowed not from a hatred of him, nor yet from an absolute want of love to him; but it flowed from the weakness of his faith and love, and the strength of his remaining unbelief. His faith and love were habitually stronger than his unbelief; but in that hour of temptation, unbelief had the ascendant; yet it did not keep its place long; for Christ, by looking to him, looked his unbelief out of countenance: and as for the sincerity of his love, he appeals to the Searcher of hearts; *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.*

Examine yourselves, then, my brethren, in this matter. If ye feel in your hearts an abiding principle of love to Christ, whereby ye esteem him, desire him, and delight in him above all things, ye may be satisfied, that unbelief does not absolutely prevail in you, but that ye have the faith of God's elect.

5. When unbelief absolutely prevails in the heart, the man's heart is altogether impure, and the man's conversation is disorderly, and not as becometh the gospel; whereas, the man who has a principle of faith, it purifies his heart, and regulates his life according

according to the laws of Christ. What faith applies for this end is the blood of Christ, and it is always effectual; for *the blood of his Son Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin*. Now a pure heart is the only foundation of a pure and undefiled walk; it is only those that are thus purified that are capable of it. Hence the charge, to maintain good works, is laid upon them who have believed in God, Tit. iii. 8. It is true, indeed, the believer's walk is not without blemishes; he sometimes stumbles and falls deep into the mire, as Peter did; but then he does not lie still there; nay, he rises up again, and runs to the fountain for cleansing. Neither is this stumbling habitual and customary to him: it is occasioned at times by the force of temptation from Satan and the world without, or the remains of unbelief within. He is not himself when he makes these stumbles.

But, on the other hand, there is in them unbelief absolutely prevailing; their hearts are altogether loathsome and defiled; they are crammed full of immortalised lusts, which, like soldiers from hell, quarter upon them, and are all going over other. There is no contrary principle brought in either to quell them, or expel them, and so they just do as they please; even as when there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes. Now, this impure and disorderly heart cannot miss to produce an impure and disorderly walk. He in whom unbelief absolutely prevails, can never be a habitually tender walker. He may indeed have a form of godliness: he may do some good works; I mean good as to the matter of them, being commanded of God. He may likewise abstain from gross sins; but the ha-

bitual temper of his soul, and tenor of his life, can never be as becomes the gospel. Try yourselves by this mark. The tree is known by its fruit. If ye be real believers, your faith will purify your life as well as your hearts. Ye will be diligent, constant and universal in your endeavours after holiness.

6. Though people may hold on in a profession for a time, while unbelief absolutely prevails in their hearts, yet, in a day of trial, this bitter root will discover itself; whereas those who have the faith of God's operation, hold fast their profession to the end, whatever their trials be. Christ records it to the honour of the church of Smyrna, that she held fast his name, and had not denied his faith, even in those days wherein Antipas his faithful Martyr was slain among them, Rev. ii. 13. Their faith had stood the trial of the fire of persecution; and it was not found reprobate silver, but declared to be genuine. But where unbelief absolutely prevails, it dispirits a man for trials, makes him faint and draw back in the day of adversity. Like the sons of Ephraim, who though they were armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle, Psal. lxxviii. 9.

Quest. But what shall we say, when unbelief prevails so far as to make a person not only doubt of the promises of God, but to call in question the very fundamental principles of religion, as the being and attributes of God, and the truth and authority of the scriptures? Can unbelief so far prevail against a real believer? I answer, Yea it may. We have heard of gracious persons thus exercised. Unbelief has set so strongly against them, that they have been like to raze the very foundations. Did not unbelief prevail

to such a degree over the psalmist, that he was almost turned atheist. The words of his unbelief were, *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning*, Psal. lxxiii. 13, 14. Yet this man was a great believer, as appears from the issue of the temptation. Hence I say, *1st*, That when unbelief prevails thus far over a believer, his faith is not thereby expelled; it is only kept at under, and its activity is restrained. It is in that case like a spark of fire buried under ashes, so that it does not send forth either heat or light, but still is alive, and when the ashes are scattered it appears. So, when this mist, smoke, and ashes of unbelief are scattered by the blowings of the Spirit, the principle of faith appears like the sun from under a cloud. *2^{dly}*, I say, that oftentimes they are believers not of a middle stature, but of the first rank, whom the Lord thus exercises. Such strong assaults of unbelief, are so far from being inconsistent with the state of a believer, that they are generally made upon the strongest believers. Pirates generally seize upon the ships that are most richly laden. The more faith that a man has, the greater eye-sore is he to Satan; and he will be sure to employ all his power, and all his policy against him. Besides, whom the Lord designs for great service and great sufferings, he prepares them for the same, by sore conflicts with Satan and the unbelieving heart. Witness the apostle Paul. *3^{dly}*, I say, those sore assaults of unbelief are, in the end, turned to the believer's good and advantage. The trees of God's Eden take the deeper root after such sore shakings. When Asaph went to the sanctuary of God, he got clearer

clearer views of God's providence, with respect to the wicked, than ever he had before. *Then did I see their end, surely thou didst set them in slippery places, &c.* And this faith and confidence in God as his God, became more firm and stedfast than ever it did before. It is really surprising to see the difference betwixt his frame of spirit in the 10th and 14th verses and in the 23d, 24th and 25th verses of the chap. In the former, he is in the very heat of the battle with unbelief, and he fairly gets the fall, which makes him cry out, that religion is a vain thing: but when we come down to the 23d verse, we find him get to his feet again; and behold, he is not only speaking like one that had faith, but like one that had the assurance of faith. *Nevertheless I am continually with thee, &c.* Strange! is this the man who a little before was calling religion a vain thing? Surely his fall has made him to stand the more firm: His shaking has rooted him: the furnace has purged him, and his faith is come forth pure as gold.

And now let me apply this doctrine by way of exhortation. *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.*

1. Consider, that unbelief is a clandestine enemy, that may hide itself not only in your house, but in your heart, while ye are not aware. This enemy may be living in you, and working in you, when ye know it not. *Therefore take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.* Examine your own selves; prove your own selves, whether ye be in the faith.

2. *Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, for it will turn all that ye do into sin, and*
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so spoil the acceptance both of your persons and performances. Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin, and without faith it is impossible to please God. Unbelief will turn your prayers and praises, your reading, your hearing and communicating all into sin. It will make them all an abomination unto the Lord. The proud hypocrite, and self justiciary never performs a duty, but he presently marks God his debtor for it: not remembering, that for every one of these duties, God marks him a debtor to his law, to his justice, to his wrath, and all because they are done in unbelief.

3. Take heed of the evil heart of unbelief, for it separates betwixt Christ and you. It stands betwixt you and him; and so long as it prevails absolutely, you the sinner, and he the Saviour, will never meet. Therefore, as ye regard your souls, beware of unbelief. For though ye may be saved from your unbelief, yet ye will never be saved in your unbelief.

4. The solemn ordinance now near in view, calls you to take the caution in the text. Communicants, *Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.* If unbelief absolutely prevail in your hearts, ye are enemies to Christ, and so have nothing to do with that feast which he has prepared for his friends. Ye can never expect the Master's welcome; ye can never expect comfort or establishment to your souls by this ordinance, if ye are yet in unbelief. Nay, ye will eat and drink judgment to yourselves.

By way of Direction.

1. Be convinced of the greatness of the sin of unbelief. Look upon it as that sin, which above all others is most dishonouring to God, and hurtful to your own souls: for it is the ruin of the hearers of the gospel,

pel, that they do not believe unbelief to be a sin, at least such a heinous one as we have represented it.

2. Be much in self-examination. Go down to the chambers of your hearts, and ransack every corner of them for unbelief; and when ye have examined yourselves with all the strictness ye are capable of, beg of God that he would search and try you, that he would find out this action of unbelief in your hearts, and stone it out before your eyes.

3. Be much in prayer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would help your unbelief, and increase your frequent application to the throne of grace, as a most excellent antidote against unbelief.

4. Resolutely credit the promise of the gospel. Believe, that since he has called you to come unto him, he is willing to save you, and will save if ye come unto him. If Satan and the unbelieving heart say, thou hast so sinned, and shalt thou be saved? Your answer is native and true. I have so sinned: *But God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

5. Lay this down for a conclusion; that all the dispensations of providence work towards the accomplishment of the promise. Unbelief is a constant carper at the providence of God: it urges it as a bar set in the way of the promise. But do ye silence these malignant whispers of unbelief, by *holding the beginning of your confidence stedfast unto the end.*

S E R M O N XIII.

CHRIST the one Thing needful.

LUKE X. 42. *But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

IN this imperfect state, we stand in need of a great many things to make our lives tolerably easy and comfortable. We are a compound of flesh and spirit, are placed in various relations, and have different spheres of action assigned unto us, by all which we are subjected unto several necessities.

All mankind would be happy, and naturally shrink at the thoughts of misery: but wherein true happiness consists, or what is the chief good, is a question that hath met with different solutions, according to peoples different tastes and apprehensions of things. We hear of no less than two hundred and eighty-eight different opinions about the chief good among the heathens. The covetous man places happiness in riches; the ambitious man in honour and power; the voluptuous man in sensual pleasures. The sensual atheist says, eat, and drink, and play, for after death there is no pleasure; or to put it in scripture language, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.*

But divine revelation determines this question, while it calls to seek first the kingdom of God and

his righteousness, as the one thing needful, and that good part which shall not be taken away from us.

Our blessed Lord here comes to Bethany, to the house of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, the same persons that we read of in the eleventh chapter of John. Martha busies herself in providing for Christ's entertainment, whilst her sister Mary attends upon his word and doctrine, as one earnestly desirous to know and embrace the way of salvation. The reproof which Christ gives Martha, is not designed to cast any reflection upon the courteous entertainment of friends and strangers, for it is elsewhere commanded and commended: *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares*, Heb. xiii. 2. So did Abraham and Lot, as we read, Gen. xviii. And it is a part of the character of the widows that were to be chosen into the number, that they have lodged strangers, 1 Tim. v. 10. The heathens thought that the gods had a peculiar care of strangers, and that they behoved to be very acceptable to the deities who shewed kindness to strangers. Therefore there is nothing said here in opposition to hospitality, or care to have things honest and decent in the sight of all men. But herein Martha erred, and for this she was reproofed, that she made the entertainment of our Saviour a work of so much trouble and perplexity to herself, that she could not attend upon his instructions, and so she lost the benefit which she might have had by the great Prophet his being in her house. It was needless to be so anxious in providing a dinner or supper for him who had meat to eat which they knew not of, it being *his meat and his drink to do*
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the will of him that sent him, and to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

But one thing is needful, &c. Here are three propositions. 1. That there is one thing needful. 2. That Mary had chosen that good part. 3. That it should never be taken from her.

Interpreters have several conjectures about this one thing. Some tell us, he meant no more, than that one dish or service was enough; but this is so low and mean, that it needs no more to confute it than just to mention it. Others make it a life of retirement for contemplation of divine things. But Mary's chusing rather to spend the time in hearing Christ preach, than in preparing a supper for him, will not prove this. Therefore, by the one thing needful, and the which shall not be taken away from those who chuse it, I understand, Christ himself, or an interest in Christ, which comes to the same thing. He is called that good, or the good; *The good Lord pardon every one*, Heb. *Jehovah the good*, i. e. the Messiah: *he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good*, Mic. vi. 8. Namely, in point of acceptance with God, and that only is the Messiah; and since God hath shewed this unto you, you are bound, in a way of gratitude for such a discovery, to do justice, &c.

And this sense I judge the most convenient, likewise, because it includes the other probable senses that are given, as that it is religion that is here called the one thing needful, or that it is the care of the soul; for without Jesus Christ there can be no true religion, nor yet a due care of the soul.

In discoursing from this, I propose,

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1. To shew in what sense Christ is the one thing needful.

2. That the need we have of him is absolute and indispensable.

3. How he is that good part which we all ought to chuse.

4. The nature of chusing him as the better part.

The first proposition is, that Jesus Christ is the one thing needful. Here, first, I will endeavour to shew you, in some particulars, the need we all have of Jesus Christ. This is a weighty matter. It is the great design of our preaching, and of your hearing, to impress you with a deep sense of your need of Christ. To proceed.

1. We need him as a physician. So himself tells us, Mat. ix. 12. *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* Sin, my brethren, is the hereditary disease, and the epidemical distemper in Adam's family. It is the disease of the soul, and the procuring cause of all the diseases that affect the body. The prophet describes it very pathetically, saying, *The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint,* Isa. i. 5, 6.

Now, the sick need a physician, and the more insensible they are under their disease, their danger is the greater, and the more do they need the physician. Well, Jesus Christ is the great Physician of souls appointed unto that office, and every way qualified by his Father. He is the most wise and skilful physician, thoroughly acquainted with the constitution of the patient, and the nature of the disease. He is most tender and compassionate. He can have compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way.

way. He is always successful; so that never any died under his hand: and he bestows all his pains freely, without money or price. Do not Adam's diseased family need such a physician? Yea, surely. All others are physicians of no value. Sinners yet lying in their wounds need him. None but he can raise them up. Saints, in whom he has begun the cure, still need his skill, his care, his sympathy, and his attendance, that they may not relapse, but be at length made perfectly whole.

2. We need him as an interpreter, a preacher, and prophet, to declare the will of God unto us with respect to our salvation. It is he of whom Moses spoke to the children of Israel, saying, *A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me, him shall ye hear*, Acts viii. 37. It is he whom Elihu calls an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness, Heb. His righteousness, *i. e.* the righteousness upon which he can be justified before God, Job xxxiii. 23.

We would never have known, by our own search and enquiry, the terms on which God would treat with the guilty in order to a reconciliation. The light of Nature could never make such a discovery in this matter, as would fully satisfy a guilty soul. The world by wisdom knew not God. But Jesus Christ came into the world, full of grace and truth: he manifested his Father's name: he declared his Father's will: he spoke and taught as never man spoke or taught. What need have we of such a teacher, who are naturally so ignorant, so weak, and so ready to run into mistakes about the will of God?

3. We need him as a sacrifice to make atonement
for

for our sins. The apostle tells us, *That without shedding of blood there is no remission*; but at the same time he assures us, that it is not possible, that *the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin*, Heb. x. 4. It is Christ who made peace by the blood of his cross, Col. i. 20. This has made an offended God reconcileable to a guilty world. This has procured such good-will towards them on God's part, that any sinner whatsoever, through faith in this blood, may be actually reconciled unto God.

And there is no other way of reconciliation. *Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*, Acts iv. 12.

Will ye imagine, that your repentance, your tears, vows, doings or sufferings, should be accepted before God as an atonement for your sins, and so supersede the necessity of applying to the blood of Christ? Is there any thing in nature or reason, to countenance such a presumptuous expectation? Is it not an infinite majesty that is affronted and offended by sin, and can these little things be accounted a just compensation for the same? Are the howlings, the fears, the vows and promises of malefactors, accepted by human governors as an atonement for their crimes? By no means. And why should ye think, that the great Lawgiver will accept of that which would be reckoned an affront to the laws among men?

Since, then, we are guilty creatures, we need Jesus Christ as a great high-priest, to apply his atoning blood unto our souls, and to reconcile us unto God.

4. We need him as a cautioner and surety to undertake for us. Hence he is called *The Surety of a better*

better testament, Heb. vii. 22. There is a twofold debt we lie under, one of punishment for past transgressions, another of obedience; and upon both these accounts we greatly need a surety, a cautioner and undertaker for us.

As to the debt of punishment, he took it upon him and payed it by his death, and obtained a discharge in his resurrection, which is ascribed unto his Father as the Judge, discharging him from the prison of the grave, for the elect world, which he undertook to pay.

As to the debt of obedience, he likewise undertook it, and it was necessary he should do it; for, altho' the death of Christ might satisfy as to the penalty of the bond, yet the principal sum therein contained, *viz.* obedience to the law for life and salvation, could not be cancelled, therefore Christ took it upon him, becoming a bond-servant to his Father, in the room of those, who, by breaking their service, had fallen under the curse, and so were in bondage, Phil. xxvi. 7. 8. Moreover, the obedience of the saints to the law, as a rule of life, is secured by Jesus Christ. He undertakes for them in all their duties, difficulties and temptations. They walk up and down in his name: they go on in his strength, making mention of his righteousness: they are in themselves weak, but strong in him.

5. We need him as a guide, leader and commander. The Messiah is prophetically spoken of under these characters, Isa. lv. 4. *I have given him for a leader and commander to the people.* He is called *the Captain of our salvation*, Heb. ii. 10. *The Author and Finisher of our faith*, Heb. xii. 2.

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The passage through the world is difficult and dangerous at all times. Many dark steps and wild mazes lye betwixt this and Emmanuel's land. And man's way is not in himself: *It is not in him that walketh to direct his steps.* If we be left unto our own guiding, we will soon turn aside into the crooked paths wherein destroyers go. But Jesus Christ is the breaker of his people's way to Zion: he goes upon their head, and makes crooked ways straight, and rough ways plain and even before them.

Oh, my brethren, do not you need such a guide and leader in the way? How think you to go thro' the world, the lion's dens, and mountains of leopards, without him? How think ye to go out of the world, to enter the dark valley of the shadow of death, the awful passage betwixt the two worlds, without his rod and his staff to comfort you?

6. We need him as an Advocate and Intercessor with his Father, to make up and to maintain our peace. Oh how comfortable news is it to the household of faith, that *Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us,* Heb. ix. 24. *That if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,* 1 John. ii. 1. Saints need assistance in duties, support under afflictions, strength against the buffetings of temptation. They need daily supplies of light, life and joy; and all these are secured unto them, by virtue of Christ's appearance in the presence of God for them.

Many accusations and charges are brought against the saints, by the law, and by their own consciences, and

and by Satan, who is called the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them before God night and day: but Christ, as an advocate, repels all these accusations, and makes the saints to stand righteous in God's sight, and to continue in his favour.

7. We need him as a King and Ruler, to subdue us unto himself, and to defend us from our enemies, who are numerous, powerful and subtle. We have enemies within our own breasts, unmortified lusts and corruptions, that are extremely dangerous, being near us, and constantly with us: but, through our King we shall do valiantly, and be more than conquerors over them all. We have a world of wicked men in battle array against us; but he that is in us is mightier by far than all they that are against us. *Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; but the very God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly.*

Observe, He says not, We shall bruise him under our feet, but God shall do it. Yet, he says not, He shall bruise him under his own feet, but under yours. The victory shall be yours tho' wrought by him.

It is probable, that were the believer, in the day he gives his hand to Christ, to see all the difficulties, dangers and sore trials he is to go through before he finish his course, they would mightily damp and discourage him. But, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* Future trials are, in the wisdom and goodness of providence, kept from our knowledge, that we may not suffer them before they come, as well as after. But, when unforeseen trial comes, aid, assistance and support comes along with it.

Lastly, We need him for sanctification; therefore

we have great reason to be thankful, that, among other things, *he is made unto us, of God, sanctification*, 1 Cor. i. 30. Jesus Christ crucified, is the great ordinance of heaven for the sanctification of an unholy world, as well as for the justification of a guilty world.

The blood of his cross has a twofold virtue in it; the one as shed to justify us, the other as sprinkled to sanctify us. Hence it is called *The blood of sprinkling*, Heb. xii. 24. And it is said to *purge our consciences from dead works, and to cleanse us from all sin*. Now, as without holiness we cannot get heaven, so without Christ we cannot get holiness. Therefore great is our need of him in that respect.

I proceed next to shew, that Jesus Christ is the one thing needful; or, that the need we have of him is absolute and indispensable.

There are some things necessary to our being or existence; and there are some things necessary to our well-being or happiness, which are two very different things.

To the continuance of our being, the influence of an all-supporting providence is absolutely necessary. *In him we live, move, and have our being, he upholds all things by the word of his power*, Acts xvii. 28. Heb. xiii.

But to the procuring and maintaining our well-being or happiness, since we became guilty creatures, an interest in Christ is absolutely necessary: for *there is no salvation in any other; nor is there any name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus*, Acts iv. 12. *Other foundation, in point of happiness, can no man lay than that is laid, which*

which is Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. iii. 11. i. e. no man can do it lawfully, warrantably, or profitably.

If we consider Jesus Christ absolutely, as he is very and eternal God, there is no doubt his influence is indispensibly necessary to the continuance of any thing in being; for, as such, he upholds all things by the word of his power. But we speak of Jesus Christ as Mediator betwixt God and man; and his influence as such respects the happiness or well-being of the creatures who have fallen into sin and misery.

To set this in a clear light, we may observe, that to our well-being or happiness for eternity, we need two things, *viz.* the pardon of our sins, and the sanctification of our natures, neither of which it is possible for us to obtain but through Jesus Christ: therefore our need of him is absolute and indispensable.

1. No pardon of sin without him; *Without shedding of blood there is no remission; but the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.* The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin; and the shedding of human blood on the altar, was ever an abomination unto God. Therefore the blood of Christ, which is also the blood of God, is that only which can appease an offended Deity, and render him propitious and favourable to the guilty. It is only by the blood of Jesus that we have boldness to draw nigh unto God. *Through this man is preached unto us the forgiveness of sins, and through him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses, Acts xiii. 38, 39.*

2. No sanctification without him; for *he is made unto us of God sanctification.* As nothing can remove the guilt of sin but his blood, so nothing but the same

blood can purge the conscience from the filth of sin, or break its power and dominion in the soul, Heb. ix. 14. 1 John i. 7.

Thus, without pardon and sanctification, there is no inheriting the kingdom of God; but, without Christ, there is neither pardon nor sanctification, as is already shewn. Therefore an interest in him is absolutely and indispensibly necessary, in order to our eternal happiness.

USE I. If Christ be the one thing needful, This reproves the thoughtless and inconsiderate part of mankind, whereof there are a great number. They rush forward into the pleasures of sin, like the horse into the battle, without ever considering that bitterness and death will be the end of these things. Solomon very elegantly decyphers the thoughtless sinner, in the person of the man seduced by the strange woman; *He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks: till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life, Prov. vii. 22. 23.*

Ah, what an unmanly as well as an unchristian thing is it, for rational creatures to pass their lives in a dream or in a ramble. By thought and reflection, God has distinguished us from the beasts that perish. But sin makes people so thoughtless, so stupid and inconsiderate with respect to things of the greatest moment, that God upbraids them with the sagacity of the brutes, and sends them unto them to learn wisdom, Isa. i. 3. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Jer. viii. 7. Yea, the stork*

in the heaven knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallows observe the time of their coming, but my people knoweth not the judgment of the Lord.

2. Those that are cumbred about many things, like Martha, that are immoderately thoughtful about their life, what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be cloathed. This temper is forbid by our Saviour, and is very dangerous, as it has a tendency to juttle out the main concern, the one thing needful, which we should seek and secure first of all, Mat. vi. 25. compared with verse 33.

Some people are naturally of doubtful minds, as the scripture phrase is, they are anxious and solicitous about the worldly comforts and enjoyments which they possess; they are frequently foreboding evil to themselves, and fearing where there is no cause of fear. Such a temper is a great enemy to the life of faith, and needs much grace to subdue and mortify it. Such persons should frequently cast up in their minds, the indispensable necessity, the infinite worth and excellency of Jesus Christ, of heaven and eternal happiness; as also, the precarious, uncertain and unsatisfying nature of all created enjoyments, and then they would have them as though they had them not.

3. Covetous earthly-minded persons, who, forgetting the noble original of their souls, basely bow down to this earth, and load themselves with thick clay. These are enemies to the cross of Christ, and their end is destruction. *The love of the Father is not in them*, and therefore they love not his Son, nor care for his salvation, Phil. iii. 18. 1 John ii. 15.

Instead

Instead of labouring for the true bread, which the Father sent down from heaven, and which only maketh the soul to live, they feed upon dust with the serpent, and upon husks with the swine. They weary themselves for very vanity, and spend their labour for that which profiteth not. Like the Gadarenes, they prefer their swine to Christ, and see more beauty on a piece of the white and yellow dust of the earth, than ever they saw in him who is altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand.

Ah, covetous earthly souls! this world at present fills your hearts, your mouths, and your hands; and ye see no need of that which God hath declared to be the one thing needful. But what will be the end of this course? This wealth and riches which ye value so highly, may take wings and leave you as bare as the trees in Winter: and supposing they should continue with you while ye live, where is your portion for the next world? How will you do without Christ when ye are stript of all these things, and carried into the immediate presence of God, to have your eternal state determined by a sentence from his mouth?

S E R M O N XIV.

CHRIST the one Thing needful.

LUKE X. 42. *But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

[Second SERMON on this Text.]

The Method proposed was,

1. **T**O shew in what sense Christ is the one thing needful.

2. That the need of him is absolute and indispensable.

3. How he is that good part which we all ought to chuse.

4. The nature of chusing him as the better part. The two first of these heads were discussed in the last discourse. I now proceed,

3. To shew how he is that good part which we all ought to chuse.

Jesus Christ is that good part we should all chuse for our portion. Here, first, we shall consider, how Jesus Christ is that good part. And in general, we may observe, that it is not his essential goodness as God, but his mediatory goodness that we speak of, by which I mean his fitness or sufficiency for all those ends and purposes for which he was appointed Mediator. Hence,

1st, He

1st, He is good for all the purposes of the divine glory. He answers exactly all God the Father's glorious purposes for which he chose him; the which he was pleased to testify by an audible voice from heaven, first at his baptism, and then at his transfiguration, saying, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*

He is good for repairing the injured honour of God, inasmuch that none but he could have done it. The sin of man reflected a kind of dishonour upon God, and cast a stain upon all his moral perfections. In breaking the law thou dishonourest God, as the apostle speaks, Rom. ii. 3. Now, dishonour reflected upon a person of worth, cannot be repaid but by one equally worthy and honourable; for the satisfaction must be made by restoring of honour again, and that will depend upon the honour and worth of the party honouring. Now, who was good, who was fit for this purpose but Jesus Christ, who being very and eternal God, was equally honourable with the Father, and so had of his own wherewith to repair the injury done to his Father's honour.

He is good for managing the world at present; and therefore the government is, by his Father, devolved upon his shoulders, which are strong to bear the weight thereof. *The Father hath put all things under his feet, and made him to be head over all things to the church,* as the apostle says, Eph. i. 22.

There are three things necessary for good government; wisdom, power, and patience; all which are most eminently in Jesus Christ. *In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,* Col. ii. 3. Solomon says, *Wo unto thee O land, when thy king is a child,*

child, Eccl. xi. 16. namely, in point of wisdom for the administration. But the King of the world, tho' he was an infant of days, is the Ancient of days, with whom wisdom resides in its full perfection.

He has likewise authority and power sufficient for government. The Father, speaking of him, says, *I have laid help upon one that is mighty; mine arm also shall strengthen him*, Psal. lxxxviii. 19. and downwards. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, to destroy his enemies, as well as the Lamb-God, for taking away the sin of the world.

He is endowed with admirable patience, which is necessary for the continuance of the world, and the present state of things, until all the elect be brought in. He is set down at the right hand of God, expecting patiently till his enemies be made his footstool, Heb. x. 13. Hence he suffers them to live when he could destroy them, and to multiply in successive generations when he could instantly cut them off.

Thus, the great affair of governing an unruly wicked world for some thousand years, has been committed of the Father unto the Son, and he is every way fitted for it.

The judging of the world, and taking in the accounts both of angels and men, is committed unto him, and he is good for it. *The Father judgeth no man; but he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead*, Acts xvii. 31. And he has all the accounts of the world upon his fingers, so that he is ready to

judge the quick and the dead, and to give every man according as his work shall be, 1 Pet. iv. 5. Rev. ult.

12.

Thus he is good for all the ends and purposes of his Father's glory, while he repairs his honour, injured by sin, manages an unruly world for him while it lasts, and is to judge and reward all at the end of the world.

2. He is good for all the wants and necessities of sinners. He is a Prophet for instruction; a Priest for oblation, intercession and benediction; a King for rule, and government, and conquest. He is made unto them of God wisdom, 1 Cor. i. 30.

More particularly, he is good,

1st, For all sorts of sinners, young and old, high and low, noble and ignoble, rich and poor. It is true, *not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called*, 1 Cor. i. 26. Yet some of that kind are called in every age; and that so few of them are called, is not that they have no need of Christ, or that Christ is not good and fit for them, but that they refuse to come unto him, and do not feel their need of him, being carried aloft upon the airy wings of worldly prosperity, and trusting in uncertain riches.

2^{dly}, He is good for all states and conditions; for health and for sickness; for prosperity and for adversity; for public and for private stations. Art thou in health and strength? Thou hast need of Jesus Christ to make up the great breach betwixt God and you, while ye have time and opportunity, and to teach you by his Spirit, to improve yourselves to the glorious purposes of a happy eternity.

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Art thou in sickness and trouble, and does death stare thee in the face? What comfort, what pleasant prospect can ye have without Jesus Christ? Who can ease the anxious mind, and give you peace upon a solid foundation, but Jesus Christ alone?

3dly, He is good at all times and seasons. What is good for one man may be bad for another: what is good at one time, may be bad at another. But Jesus Christ is good at all times and seasons. A crown of gold would not be good for a pained head; nor would the finest music, or the richest banquet be good for a dying man; they would be unseasonable. But Jesus Christ is good at all times.

For a farther view of his goodness, we may consider it comparatively with other things, which men commonly esteem and call good.

1. Riches and wealth are esteemed good things. What unwearied pains are men at to purchase them? Yea, how many spare not to purchase them at the expence of their credit, of their consciences, and their souls? But what is all the gold of Ophir, when compared with Jesus Christ? Let their money perish with them, said Galeacius Caraccialus.

Riches cannot satisfy the soul of the possessor: but Jesus Christ is an all satisfying portion. They make themselves wings and flee away. But whoso chuse the good part, it shall never be taken away from them.

2. Honour and grandeur are esteemed good things. How do men strive for them? What mean submissions, and unmanly cringes are made to those in power for posts and preferments, and how much do men

value themselves upon them when they have obtained them? But what is worldly honour and grandeur when compared with Jesus Christ? To be a friend of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ, is infinitely more honourable than to be a minister of state; yea, a king upon a throne, and at the same time a servant of sin. The world's honour is a noisy nothing; it is a meer bubble, that swells and looks big, and then breaks and vapours into nothing. But the honour that cometh from God, that arises from an interest in Christ, is solid and substantial; and those who have it shall be honourable and highly exalted, when the right honourable sinners shall be sunk in eternal infamy and disgrace.

3. Great friends are esteemed good things. People are fond to contract friendships and alliances with the rich and powerful. David was fond of marrying Saul's daughter; for it pleased him well to be the king's son-in-law. Probably he thought it would be the foundation of a sure and lasting friendship betwixt him and the king. But, behold, upon that alliance his troubles continually increased, and Saul hated him more and more, and sought his life.

His son Solomon contracted an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and made a league with Hiram king of Tyre, two powerful monarchs, thinking thereby to establish himself more firmly upon his throne, and to make proselytes out of the kingdoms to the worship of the true God. But this alliance weakened his hands, and turned away his heart after other gods, 1 Kings xi. 57. But Jesus Christ is the best of friends, the friend that sticketh closer

closer than a brother. A very small incident will deprive one of the friendship of the great, and turn their former love and regard into the keenest hatred and contempt. But Jesus Christ's friendship endureth for ever; whom he loves, he loves unto the end. He is a friend in life and in death, in judgment and through eternity.

4. Children are esteemed good things. David says, *Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the band of a mighty man, so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that bath his quiver full of them,* Psal. cxxvii. 3. and downwards.

The Jewish nation seem to have had a more than ordinary fondness to live in their posterity; for barrenness was a curse amongst them, and exposed them to contempt: and the expectation of being the mother of the Messiah, contributed greatly to their fondness for issue.

But as Elkanah said to Hannah, grieving for want of children, *Am not I better unto thee than ten sons?* 1 Sam. i. 8. So I may say, Jesus Christ is better than the nearest relations, even those which came forth of our loins and out of our bowels. He has promised to the eunuchs that keep his sabbaths, and chuse the things that please him---Saying, *Even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters, I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off,* Isa. lvi. 4, 5.

The good name and savoury character, raised by believing in Christ, and living unto him, tho' it should not be continued in the world by children according

according to the flesh, yet it shall not be cut off; for *the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.*

5. Knowledge and learning are esteemed good things; and in many respects they are very desirable and useful. But how mean and insignificant are all the improvements, in what is commonly called learning, when compared with the knowledge of Christ crucified? The apostle Paul may well be allowed to give judgment in this competition, because he was both an able scholar, and an able minister of the New Testament; and speaks in this matter both from inspiration and experience. Hear him, then, saying to the Corinthians, *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified,* 1 Cor. ii. 2. Behold him triumphing over all the wisdom of the world, and bidding it a defiance: *Where is the wise, where is the Scribe?* 1 Cor. i. 20. and downwards. Where is the wise at Egypt, at Athens, and at Rome? Where is the Scribe at Jerusalem? Where are the disputers among them all? Solomon observes of human learning, that he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. It is but a small progress we can make in it, and it is made with great labour and many disappointments. But the knowledge of Christ is to the saving of the soul; and it is attended with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

What though we knew all the secrets of nature, and could unravel her from the sycamore to the cedar, it will profit us nothing without the knowledge of the mystery of God in Christ. What tho' we knew all the heavenly bodies, in their natures, positions, motions, operations and influences, if we are ignorant of Christ the Son of righteousness, the bright
and

and morning star, who gives light, and life, and liberty to the soul *.

6. Carnal ease and worldly pleasures are accounted good things. Job takes notice of the easy and merry life of the wicked, saying, *Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ,* Job. xxi. 8. and downwards. But all worldly pleasures are gross, dreggy and adulterate; yea, there are pricking thorns and briers in them, and they end in everlasting pains, after a very short and uncertain duration; for the triumphing of the wicked is but short, and the joy of the hypocrite perisheth.

But whoso have Christ, have joy unspeakable and full of glory: a joy, solid, sublime, and exquisitely refined, and enduring for evermore. They who are possessed with this joy, would not exchange their lot for a thousand worlds.

For a farther view of Christ's excellency, we may compare him with those things which the saints and people of God esteem good things, and which really are so.

1. The ordinances and institutions of Christ are esteemed good things, and much prized by all the

* "I desire humbly to bless his name, that hath delivered me from the painful pursuit of what they call learning, and from the foolish pleasures of venting the little of it that I know. I write it on my books, and wish it engraven on my heart, I determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." Bishop Leighton in a letter.

faints.

saints. Notice with what vehemency of affection David speaks of the public ordinances in his time; *My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness, Psal. lxxxiv. 2, 10.*

Publick ordinances are the trysting places, where the Lord often meets with his people, and manifests himself unto them in a very gracious manner, communicating light, life, comfort and joy unto their souls.

But still Christ is infinitely better. The fountain is preferable to the streams, and the cause to the effect. The virtue, for convincing, confirming and comforting, is not in the ordinances themselves, nor does it arise from the piety, learning, eloquence and warm address of the administrators, but from the blessing of Jesus Christ, who institute them for the benefit of the church. Ordinances cannot profit you without Christ, though they were dispensed with all the purity and rhetoric of an angel; but Christ can profit you, not only with, but also without ordinances when they cannot be obtained. He can be a little sanctuary unto his people when driven into the wilderness, to mountains and dens, and caves of the earth.

2. The graces of the Spirit in believers, are accounted good things, as they really are, being the special workmanship of God. But as he who built the house has more honour than the house, so Jesus Christ is more precious than all graces whatsoever. Therefore, believers, trust not in the grace of God within you, but in the God of all grace without you.

Remember

Remember Satan is a subtle adversary, and when he cannot prevail with the children, to put the wealth and honour of the world, friends, and relations, or even the ordinances of the gospel in the place of Jesus Christ, he has yet a more subtle plot behind, and that is, to take those very graces which Christ has wrought by his Spirit in the hearts of the saints, and to put them in the room of Christ himself. His grand plot is to turn Christ out of the heart; and the most subtle way of accomplishing it, is to leave something very like him in the heart, *viz.* his own work of grace.

3. The holy scriptures are accounted a good thing, and that very justly; for in them we have the words of eternal life, and they are they which testify of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ. I never knew, nor heard, nor read of a serious christian, who did not put a great value upon his Bible. And such exquisite pleasure and immense profit, arises from the right use of it, that one would think, if any thing could be missed in heaven, it should be this same Bible. But who will grudge being removed from the streams, when they are set down with the fountain? The love of God and Christ, and all the glorious things of God, will be read more fully and clearly in the face of Jesus Christ, than ever they could have been in a Bible. The light of the moon, and of the stars, is very acceptable to the traveller by night; but he will not grudge their removal upon the rising of the sun, tho' before he could not have made his way without them. To go through this dark ensnaring world, without the light of the word, would be utterly impracticable for the christian. But being in heaven with Christ,

the shining Son of righteousness, he needs that light no more.

4. Heaven is accounted a happy state, and a blessed place; but it is the presence of Christ that makes it so: therefore he is infinitely preferable unto it. Paul desired to depart, that he might be with Christ. There is a mighty desire among mankind after heaven, as it is a place of happiness, but not as it is a place of consummate holiness and uninterrupted communion with Jesus Christ. Many desire heaven, because they know they cannot be in the world for ever, and because they think hell bad quarters. Carry them to heaven when they die, and they would be very easy, though they should not see the face of the man Christ Jesus through all eternity.

But, my brethren, if a real christian were carried to heaven, and did not find Christ there, he would not think himself in heaven. It is the Lamb in the middle of the throne that casts a shining lustre upon the place, and diffuses joy and chearfulness in the hearts and countenances of all the happy inhabitants.

I proceed in the next place. To consider this choosing of Christ as the better part. Concerning this, I say,

1. Jesus Christ must be our free and voluntary choice. Joshua, a type of Jesus, says to the people of Israel, *Choose ye this day whom ye will serve*; and at the same time he tells them the choice he had made for himself and his house, Joshua xxiv. 15. A man may be forced into any thing but into real religion. The menaces and threatnings of magistrates, and such as be in power, may force people into an external profession of religion, and an outward attendance on the ordinances

dinances thereof; but they will never embrace Jesus Christ as their prophet, priest, and king, until, by a day of divine power, they are made willing, and he becomes their own voluntary choice. Your parents, your masters, your ministers, and others who wish well to your souls, may urge this upon you by the strongest arguments; but it is only he who opened the heart of Lydia, that can persuade and enable you to choose the better part.

2. As in all choices there is a competition, so the competitors here are Jesus Christ, with all his fulness on the one side, and the world with all its vain allurements on the other side. These, in Old Testament language, are God and Baal, as the prophet Elijah expostulates with the people of Israel, saying, *How long do ye halt betwixt two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; if Baal, follow him,* 1 Kings xviii. 21, and in the New Testament language, they are God and mammon, as our Saviour speaks, Mat. vi. 24. *Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* This mammon was, among the heathens, the god of riches; and the word in the New Testament signifies, the world with all its allurements of riches, honours and pleasures.

Satan, who bears the title of the god of this world, had the impudence to attempt to bribe our Saviour to his service, by a proffer of the kingdoms of the world, though, thanks be to God, not one of them, nor any thing pertaining to them is at his disposal, see Matt. iv. 8, 9. And albeit he gained nothing upon Christ, yet he has often great success among the children of men by his proffers of this kind. He prevailed upon Judas for less than a kingdom, or the half of a kingdom, when he made him prefer thirty

pieces of silver to Jesus Christ. So did he upon Demas, who once followed the apostles, but afterwards forsook them through love of the present world.

3. As in making a choice, one thing is taken, and another rejected, after comparing and balancing them together, so is it here. Moses laid the afflictions of the people of God in one scale, and the pleasures of the Egyptian court in another, and upon balancing them, he fully determined with himself, rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, Heb. xi. 25.

Jesus Christ has fairly intimate, that whosoever will come after him, must take up their cross daily and follow him: and that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, the world is big with promises of ease, pleasure and prosperity: therefore a wise man, who is to make a choice here, casts up the advantages and disadvantages on both sides, and after fairly balancing accounts, he is fully and strongly determined to chuse Jesus Christ for his portion, let the world smile or frown upon him as it will.

For improvement, I would address, first, such as the Lord has already determined to chuse the better part.

1. O Bless the Lord, who gave you counsel to make such a wise and happy choice. Thus did David when he made your choice, as we see, Psal. xvi. 7. Though chusing of Christ be the most reasonable choice that a rational creature can make, yet, so blinded and biased are we through passions and prejudices, that without the over-ruling and determining power of the Spirit of God, we would never make the choice.

Perhaps

Perhaps ye have heard much from ministers in their sermons and exhortations, to persuade you to make choice of Christ, and ye should thankfully acknowledge the same. But still remember, it was the Lord himself that actually determined and disposed you to make the choice in which ye now rejoice, and have good reason so to do.

2. Rest in the choice ye have made, and never revoke it: put yourselves in remembrance of it: recognize the deed before the Lord, and charge it home upon your consciences as David did, saying, *O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my God*, Psal. xvi. 2. This was well said; yea, nothing could be better said; and therefore it should never be unsaid or gainsaid. Though the world despise the choice ye have made, regard it not, neither be discouraged; for when the day comes, that every one's choice must abide the trial, your's will appear the better choice, the enemies themselves being judges.

3. Live and walk in this world suitably unto the choice ye have made. *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: therefore walk as children of light*, Eph. v. 8. Christ has chosen you for his portion, and ye have chosen him for your portion. Since your state is so far changed from that of the rest of the world, there must be a correspondent change; such as the world may discern in the temper of your mind, and in the tenor of your life.

If ye have chosen Christ, ye must make religion the main business, and not the by-business of your lives. A faithful servant considers his master's work as his constant and ordinary business: so, if ye have chosen Christ for your Lord and master, as well as
your

your Saviour, you must serve him in holiness and in righteousness all the days of your life.

If ye have chosen Christ, ye must not dally and tamper with his enemies, which are sin, Satan, and the world. *He that is begotten of God, keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not,* 1 John v. 18. Your soul, Christian, is now to be considered as a castle and fortress for Jesus Christ, delivered up to you, to keep as a garrison. Now, think what a trust this is, not only of your own soul, but of a garrison of Christ's; and what a wickedness must it be at any time to betray it, or to hold correspondence with the enemy: yet this thou doest in every indulgence of sin. If then ye have chosen Christ, let not sin, in any instance, have dominion over you; for a subject of Christ, and a servant of sin, are utterly incompatible.

Particularly beware of the love of the world: *For who so loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him,* 1 John ii. 15. As no man can serve, so no man can love God and mammon.

I would next address such, as, like Israel of old, may be halting betwixt two opinions. They are not altogether stupid and inconsiderate about the matter of salvation: they often resolve with themselves to break off the ways of sin, and to give up with the world as a portion, and to chuse Jesus Christ as best of all; but they are so much solicited against this choice by their lusts and passions, and perhaps by some of their companions too, that they can never get the thing effectuated, but are still halting betwixt heaven and earth, betwixt Christ and the creature. To persuade

suade such to halt no longer betwixt two opinions, consider,

1st, The absolute necessity of Jesus Christ, if ever ye would see the face of God in mercy. Now, my friends, when there is choice upon the one side, and absolute and indispensable necessity on the other, reason says, that we should give up with the former, and accommodate ourselves into the latter. To cut off a hand, or an arm, is what a man would not chuse; but if there is an absolute necessity for it, so that the man cannot live unless it be done, reason makes him submit to it. Remember, then, except ye come to Jesus Christ, ye must all perish, and that eternally: and is it not better to have these right eyes dug out, and these right hands cut off, than that the whole body should be cast into hell fire?

2^{dly}, The incomparable excellency of Jesus Christ. How base and vile are the pleasures of sin? They debase and defile the immortal soul; they are but for a season either; and they end in everlasting pains. But Jesus Christ is fairer than the sons of men; he is altogether lovely; all delights and joys of the most sublime, refined and lasting nature. If ye will chuse him for your portion, ye shall never have cause to renounce the choice; but ye shall always have great ground to rejoice in it: therefore halt no longer between two opinions.

3^{dly}, Is it not shocking and shameful, to be so long in determining a matter that one would think might be very quickly determined by any rational sensible person?

Ye are rational creatures; ye are baptized persons. Now, for heaven's sake, consider, is it decent for
you

you to be undetermined, whether you will serve God or the devil? Whether ye will take Christ or the world for your portion? Whether ye will live in sin, and go to hell, or live in faith and holiness, and go to heaven, through the grace of the Lord Jesus? I persuade myself, that were there any such ridiculous competitions in worldly matters, ye would pronounce that man the veriest fool alive, who would be any time undetermined which side to chuse.

Therefore, as ye would not fall under the reproach of the most unaccountable folly and madness, halt no longer between two opinions. What ye ought to chuse, is as clear as the sun in the firmament; and if ye cannot see it, the god of this world has blinded your eyes, and he is sporting himself with your folly and misery.

4thly, Halt no longer, but make the proper choice quickly; for you know not how soon it may be out of your power to make it, were ye never so willing. Many, who resolved and purposed to chuse Christ, are this day in hell, being cut off in the midst of their delays. It is our business, as ministers of the gospel, to urge you to make choice of Christ by all the arguments we can think of; but it is not in our power, nor in our commission, to promise you any time to deliberate upon it. But, as the Holy Ghost saith, *To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

Lastly, I would address such as have chosen the service of Satan and their lusts, and seem to rest satisfied in their choice, and therefore give a deaf ear to all the calls of the gospel.

Ye are our fellow-creatures, partakers of flesh and blood

blood as well as we, and ye have immortal spirits likewise, and therefore we cannot but be moved with compassion towards you. Oh that we could pull you as brands out of the fire; that we could rouse you out of your security, and persuade you to renounce the portion ye have already chosen, and to make choice of Jesus Christ. Let me ask,

1. Though ye can ramble through the world without Christ, yet how will ye do at your going out of the world, when ye come to the mighty swellings of Jordan?

A flow of blood and spirits, a flow of prosperity, the continuance of health and strength will help to stave off convictions of guilt, and the dread of deserved wrath; but when death comes, all those smotherers of conscience will flee away, and then it will rise upon you, and rage and roar like a bear or a lion; and what shall come of you who have not one drop of the blood of Christ to pacify its clamours? and yet nothing else can do it.

2. How will ye go to judgment without him? *It is appointed for all men once to die, but after death the judgment,* Heb. ix. 27. Your guilty, naked and unbodied spirits, will be hurried into God's immediate presence at death, and your eternal state will be determined by a sentence from his mouth. God will then propose the question about your souls, as our Saviour did about the penny that was shewed him; Whose image and superscription does this soul bear, will God say: and when it is found that it does not bear the image of Christ, then God will say, down with it into the pit among the vile and unclean, eternally down with it; it shall never abide with me.

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3. How

3. How will ye appear at the last day without him? He is to appear the second time without sin unto salvation; he is to come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all them that know not God and obey not the gospel, Heb. ix. 28. 2 Thes. i. 7, 8.

They that chuse him now, will then make a glorious appearance with him, Col. iii. 4. But as for you who reject him, shame and confusion shall cover you; terror shall take hold of you; and ye shall cry to the rocks and to the mountains to fall on you and cover you from the face of the Judge.

Proposition last. Whoso chuse this better part, it shall not be taken away from them. This the scriptures manifest, in all those places where they speak of the perseverance of the saints.

The gifts and calling of God are without repentance; whom he loves, he loves unto the end. All the use I shall make of it at this time, is, to urge it as a motive to make you chuse the better part.

Consider, then, brethren, the certainty and perpetuity of this portion we would have you to chuse; it shall never be taken away from you. The same cannot be said of any thing else that people chuse for their portion. Riches make themselves wings and flee away as an eagle towards heaven; honours are like the crackling of thorns under the pot, or the foam upon the water; pleasures are but for a season; friends may deal deceitfully with us, as a brook which yields water in the Winter when it is to be had every where, but runs dry in Summer when there is most need of it. In fine, we can promise upon nothing under the sun; all is like Jonah's gourd, that may wither in a night.

But

But whoso have chosen the better part shall never be put to shame: they shall stand confidently in the gate and speak unto their foes. Heaven and earth may pass away, and shall pass away; the mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed; but the believer's portion shall remain firm and sure. When the whole frame of nature is dissolved, the believer shall stand upon the ashes of the burnt world, and cry with a loud and chearful voice, I have lost nothing.

Rf 2

SERMON

S E R M O N XV.

The Nature of seeking a crucified
CHRIST, and the Encouragement
given to those who seek him, opened
up and illustrated.

MATTH. xxviii. 5. *And the Angel answered and said unto the Women, fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.*

OUR Lord's question to Mary, weeping at his grave, may be pertinently proposed unto you who design to sit down at his table: *Whom seekest thou?* John xx. 15. Man, woman, whom seekest thou? If ye can sincerely say that ye seek a crucified Jesus, our text speaks comfort and encouragement unto you. *Fear not ye*, (says the angel to the women) *for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.*

In the words, observe,

1st, The person speaking, viz. an angel. *And the angel answered and said, &c.* This manner of speech is according to the Hebrew idiom, where those who begin to speak, are said to answer, though no body was asking them any question; of which we have a great many examples in scripture, or, as
* some

* some would have it, he answered to the thoughts of the women, though they did not ask him any question. The grief and fear that was in their hearts would appear in their countenances, and in their behaviour: for though angels know not the thoughts of our hearts directly and intuitively, yet they may know them by the signs and indications of them.

Luke and John speak of two angels at the sepulchre, though Matthew and Mark mention but one. But both accounts may agree, by supposing one angel to appear at first, and two afterwards. When the women came to the sepulchre, they saw one angel, and when they entered into the cave, they saw two angels more in shining garments, the one at the head, the other at the feet, where the body had lain.

The angels were not only spectators of that most amazing scene, God made manifest in the flesh; but they ministred unto him. They proclaimed his birth; they ministred to him in the wilderness when he was tempted of the devil. When he was in his agony, there appeared an angel to him from heaven strengthening him. And they rolled away the stone from the mouth of his grave, and proclaimed his resurrection. They proclaimed his first birth from the womb, and they proclaimed his second birth from the grave: for Christ's resurrection was a birth-day to him, in which he was declared to be the Son of God with power. The Father was then presented, as it were, with a new edition of his Son Christ Jesus. Hence, when he raised him from the dead, he said, *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, Acts

xiii. 33.

* Vid. Erasmus in Loc.

2. The

2. The persons spoken unto, *viz.* The women, Mary Magdalen, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and others. His first birth was by a woman, and the notification of his second birth was to a woman that had once been very infamous. He chused to make his first appearance to Mary Magdalen, out of whom he had cast seven devils, Mark xvi. 19. For the one great design, uniformly and steddily pursued in the whole scheme of the gospel, is to stain the pride of all glory, and to magnify the riches of grace.

The good women seem to have been in a very disconsolate state, both in their way to the sepulchre, (for they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone?) and likewise after they came to it. Mary burst out into tears, and cried, *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.*

3dly, The speech itself; *Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.* Here, 1. A word of encouragement is given to the grieved and amazed women; *Fear not ye.* Observe here, there is not one word of comfort to the poor terrified keepers, who shook and became as dead men at the appearance of the angel. When John fell at Christ's feet as dead, he raised him up and said, *Fear not*; and when the good women were affrighted at the appearance of the angel, the angel said unto them, *Fear not ye*: but when the poor graceless guard of Christ's grave were as dead men, there was none to lift them; nor is there one single word of comfort for them. This, methinks, speaks terror to all Christ's enemies. Ye are now in prosperity, your veins are full of blood, your bones of marrow, and your hearts of
pride

pride and contempt of God: but know thou, that the day is coming, when the joints of thy loins will be loosed, and thy knees shall smite one against another, and instead of one word of comfort, thou shalt be cursed and confounded. This Jesus whom thou now despisest, shall laugh at thy calamity, and mock when thy fear cometh.

Fear not *ye*; there seems to be an emphasis in the particle *ye*: it is put in opposition to the graceless watch, that were affrighted and fled, *q. d.* They, poor wretches, have cause to fear the dreadful wrath of God, and they have cause to fear the wrath of man too; Jesus his getting out of the grave, is as much as their life is worth. But *fear not ye*.

2. The ground and reason of the encouragement given them, is the good errand upon which they were come; *I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.* The keepers have reason to fear, for they have an ill conscience, and were here upon a wicked design, *viz.* to keep God's Christ in the grave. But ye are seeking him earnestly, and out of love, and ye cannot be easy till ye find him: this is a good frame, an excellent errand; Be not afraid.

Their fear did not proceed from consciousness of guilt, but from the weakness of human nature, which cannot, in its present state, bear a communication with spirits. Eliphaz tells us, that when a spirit passed before his face, fear came upon him, and trembling, which made all his bones to shake, and that the very hair of his flesh stood up, Job iv. 14, 15.

Ye seek Jesus which was crucified. The angel mentions his crucifixion as a piece of the world's infamy

my and disgrace which had lately befallen him, and he mentions it in a way of gloriation and triumph; *q. d.* Though he was lifted up on a cross, and then laid down in a grave, with a guard, a stone, and a seal, to hold him there; yet he is no more in the grave, but is risen, as he said: *Come see the place where the Lord lay.*

Crucifying was a Roman punishment, not upon freemen, but on slaves; and while the empire remained heathen, it was continued; but when the emperors themselves embraced Christianity, and the towering eagles resigned the flags unto the cross, the punishment was forbidden by the supreme authority, out of a pious honour to the death of Christ.

They laid the cross flat upon the ground, and the party was nailed to the four corners of it by the hands and feet, which were racked and stretched violently. Then the cross, with the party nailed to it, was lifted off the earth, and, by a violent jogg, which gave a painful concussion to the joints of the crucified person, it was thrust into the earth and fixed there, so that it stood erect, and the party hung upon it.

Moreover, by the common rule of the Roman law, those that were crucified, were neither permitted sepulture nor mourning; yea, a guard was usually set about them, lest any should take down the body and bury it; yet it was in the power of the magistrate, to indulge the liberty of burial. Hence it was that Joseph begged, and Pilate granted unto him the body of Jesus, that he might bury it.

Now, though a crucified Christ be to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, yet, unto you who believe, he is the wisdom of God, and
the

the power of God. Therefore, thou that seekest a crucified Jesus, be not afraid, be not ashamed, be not discouraged, thou shalt certainly find him.

In discoursing further from these words, I shall,

First, Explain the nature of seeking a crucified Jesus. And,

Secondly, Shew, that such as seek him have no reason to be afraid, but should be of good courage.

Lastly, Apply the subject.

1st, I am to explain the nature of seeking a crucified Jesus. And here four things may be briefly enquired into. 1. What it is to seek him. 2. Where we should seek him. 3. When we should seek him. 4. How we should seek him.

First, What is it to seek Christ? *Ans.* There is a threefold seeking of him, which may be noticed.

1. An *initial* seeking of him at conversion, when the sinner's first acquaintance with him is made up. The poor sinner, scorched with the terrible heat of mount Sinai, law-condemned, and self-condemned, yet apprehending the mercy of God in Christ, seeks and flies to Christ, as the hunted beast flies to his den, or the pursued malefactor to the horns of the altar. Formerly he was seeking a rest to his conscience in the barren region of the fiery law, and a rest to his heart in the empty creation, but now he seeks unto Christ for them both; and having found him, he finds them both in him.

2. A *progressive* seeking of him. David exhorts us to seek his face continually and evermore, Psal. cv. 4. And we find it given as the character of the saints in Scripture, that they are such as seek the Lord. It is their main business, their continued work

and employment. But how is it that they seek him continually? Is he very ill to be found? By no means; *He never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain*: he is of ready and easy access. But as all goodness, and all excellencies are concentrated in him, his people are still seeking for their nearer and more familiar acquaintance with him.

The philosophers say, that the search into nature is endless; for that new discoveries will always be made. Much more justly may this be said of Christ. There is no searching him out unto perfection. The seeker of him, for any thing we know, will be surprised with new discoveries of his grace and glory here, and in heaven through eternity.

3. A renewed or occasional seeking of him. Tho' those who have found Christ can never lose him again, either totally or finally, yet they may want the sensible enjoyment, even as a man may have a thing, and yet not have the use or comfort of it. This makes them with earnestness and vigour renew the enquiries after him, and to cry with Job, *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat*, Job xxiii. 3.

When new straits, difficulties and temptations occur, these minister occasion for seeking a-new unto him. When Paul got the thorn in his flesh, and the messenger of Satan was sent to buffet him, he sought unto the Lord, no less than thrice, 2 Cor. xii.

Now, in seeking of Christ, there is,

1st, As in all seeking, A sense of want. A man will not seek that which he does not think he stands in need of. It is just so in the seeking of Christ. Though he is exhibited, and offered unto all that hear

hear the gospel, yet none will enquire after him, till they have such a sense of their need of him, as that they see themselves absolutely ruined and undone without him. Hence, though the gospel offer is not restricted to sensible sinners, yet it is effectual only to such.

But alas! the most part do not feel their need of Christ, and therefore they never seek after him. The covetous worldling loves and adores a god of clay; the sensual epicure makes his belly his God; the self-justiciary trusts in a righteousness of his own; the wicked and prophane live in a state of security, though without God in the world. Thus, every class of sinners have something they put in the room of God and his Christ. But when a day of power comes, the rich man sees himself poor, and miserable, and naked without Christ; the sensual man feels himself pining away and starving, for want of the bread of life; the justiciary sees all his righteousness is *filthy rags*; the prophane wretch becomes a terror to himself, and every one of them cries out, give me Christ or else I die.

2dly, A high valuation and esteem of what we want. The sincere seekers of Christ account all things but loss and dung, when compared with Jesus Christ, as Paul does, Phil. iii. 8. Such a light account does this man make of those things which the world so highly value. Luther called the whole Turkish empire, but a bone thrown among the dogs. When the spouse is asked, *What is your beloved more than another beloved?* She attempts a particular description of his excellencies, and then winds all up in this singular encomium, that he is *altogether lovely*,

Heb. all desires, Song v. 16. The blind world wonders what the saints see in Christ, that they put such an immense value upon him, for he is to them a *stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*. But the saints have their eyes opened to see the superlative matchless beauty and excellency of Jesus Christ, so that there is nothing in this earth, no, nor in heaven, that they desire besides him.

3dly, A holy restlessness of soul, and a dissatisfaction with every thing, until we find what we are seeking. *My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, Psal. lxiii. 1. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee O God, Psal. xlii. 1.* Nothing will satisfy dry and parched ground but rain. The hart, they say, is naturally a thirsty creature, but especially when it is chased, it pants, and runs under the painful sensation of thirst, and nothing will satisfy it but the water brooks. So it is with the soul seeking Christ; all the gold of the Indies would not satisfy it without him; nay, what is more, heaven itself would not satisfy without him.

It is very observable, that when the Lord promised to send an angel before the people, to lead them into the promised land, it is said, that when the people heard the evil tidings, *they mourned, and no man put on him his ornaments, Exod. xxxiii. 4.* Strange! Was it evil tidings to hear that they were brought into the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey? True, but it was heavy to the Lord's people to hear, that the Lord himself would not go up among them; and an angel's presence would not satisfy them without him. Moses protests against it, saying,

saying, *If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.* He will rather stay with God in the wilderness, as go to Canaan with an angel.

The soul seeking Christ, is like the dove sent out of the ark, which found no rest for the sole of her foot till she got back. Hypocrites, in seeking him, take up with something else that satisfies them in the mean time, and so they are indifferent whether they find him or not. But believers can be satisfied in nothing, until they find him whom their soul loveth.

4. A hope of finding what we seek. People may seek Christ under manifold discouragements; but none will seek him in absolute despair. He has given great encouragement to seek him; for he never said to the seed of Jacob, *seek ye my face in vain*: and he says, *ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.* These promises are a firm foundation for faith and hope to rest upon, in the soul's seeking a crucified Jesus.

Secondly, Where are we to seek Christ?

1st, In the scriptures. Hence he says to the Jews, *Search the scriptures, for they are they which testify of me.* Christ is the subject of both the Testaments; he is the running title of the whole Bible; and this, above all things, should commend them unto us. It is said of Augustine, that having read Cicero's works, he commended them for their eloquence, but he passed this sentence upon them, "They are not sweet, because the name of Jesus is not in them;" and this testimony deserves the greater regard, that it comes from one who was, without question, a very great master of the heathen learning.

The saints in all ages have found him in his own word;

word; and therefore it is that they prize it so exceedingly, and rejoyce at it, as those who find great spoil. Many times they have been enlightened by it in darkness, comforted by it in afflictions, and strengthened by it in temptations. There they have Christ in types and figures; there they have him in prophecies; there they have him in precious promises; there they have him in his birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and coming to judge the world at the last day. Whosoever then would find Christ, let them search the scriptures; and if the Spirit of God shine upon them, they will be sure to find him.

2dly, In the preaching of the gospel. The public ordinances of the gospel, are wisdom's gates, heaven's trysting places, both for saints and sinners, where Christ is found of them that seek him, and sometimes found of them that seek him not. Hence wisdom says, *Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors; for whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord,* Prov. viii. 34, 35.

No fewer than three thousand souls found Christ at Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, amongst which were some of the murderous crew, who had embued their hands in the blood of Jesus; and who, of all persons whatsoever, should have been denied the benefit of that blood; but grace is sovereignly free. As the serpent was lifted upon a pole in the wilderness, that the stung Israelites might look at him and be healed; so, in the pole of the gospel offer, Jesus Christ is lifted up and exhibited, that all may look upon him and be saved.

3dly, In the sacraments of the gospel, especially the

sacrament of the supper. In this last, he is evidently set forth crucified before our eyes, and we have a representation of the whole scene of his sufferings; we are set down, as it were, at the foot of the cross, and by faith behold the whole tragedy acted over; we see his wounds, and hear his groans.

Christ made himself known to the two disciples going to Emmaus, in the breaking of bread, which, in the opinion of some, was sacramental bread. And in all the ages of the Christian church, the sacrament of the supper has been considered as a special mean of enjoying communion with Jesus Christ; and many of the saints have found it so to their own most certain and comfortable experience.

4thly, In prayer. This is another great mean of communion with God and Christ, and is called by some, the king among the duties. The prayer of faith is powerful and prevalent with God, of which there have been a great many surprizing instances. Moses was such a powerful intercessor, that God speaks as if his hands were holden by him. *Let me alone*, says he, *that my wrath may wax hot against this people*; q. d. This man is such a powerful pleader for this people, that I can do nothing against them till he holds his tongue.

The Lord says, *I will not go up in the midst of thee, for thou art a stiff-necked people*, Exod. xxxiii. Ay, but Moses falls a pleading and praying, and the Lord says, *My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest*. Would ye then have Christ? Go to the throne of grace; pray in the holy Ghost; for the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

5thly, In

5thly, In Christian fellowship. Christ himself has said it, and blessed be his name who has so often made it good, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*, Mat. xviii. 20.

This word of grace was, not long after the uttering of it, most gloriously fulfilled to the two disciples going to Emmaus. They were in a most heavy and disconsolate case, for their master had expired upon a cross; and as they thought, was yet lying cold dead in his grave, and their faith and hope seemed to be buried with him. However, they were conferring about him with a sore and heavy heart; *And it came to pass, that while they communed together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them: and though for a while they did not know him, yet at length he made himself known to them; for, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.*

O what a blessed privilege was it to hear such a commentator on Moses and the prophets, as Jesus Christ was! O what glorious mysteries would be opened up, what hidden things would be unveiled in that precious discourse! And O what a gracious impression did this discourse make upon the spirits of the two disconsolate disciples! Hear how warmly they speak of it, ver. 32. I believe the impression remains upon their spirits, now that they are in heaven, and will remain unto eternity.

I think I have read of the famous Mr. Dod, that when he had met with any two or three Christians, his usual saying was, "Now let us speak something
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of Christ." And no doubt, in such discourses, Christ often manifested himself unto him.

If Christians, in their fellowship-meetings, would speak more of Christ and his grace, and less of matters of doubtful disputation, and nothing at all in the way of bitterness against those who differ from them, it would be a promising step towards the revival of the primitive spirit of Christianity among us.

Thirdly, When should we seek Christ?

In the general, you must seek him while he is to be found, and call upon him while he is near. For there is a time coming when he will not be found. But more particularly, you must seek him,

1. In the time of youth. The royal preacher exhorts us to remember our Creator in the days of our youth. Both the powers of the mind, and the members of the body are more sprightly and vigorous, and better adapted to the purposes of religion in that stage of life than in any other. And surely, nothing can be more absurd and impious, than to spend the cream and flower of our days in the service of sin and the devil, and reserve the refuse, the very dregs of life, for the great affair of seeking God's Christ and the way of salvation through him.

O then, ye that are young, be persuaded to abandon your sins and follies, and to seek Jesus which was crucified. Methinks it is a charming thing, to see a young creature separating himself from a croud of sinners of the same age, rank and station with himself, nobly rising above the temptations of his younger years, and devoting himself to God through Christ, and minding the great concerns of eternity!

It is exceedingly pleasing to God; he takes great

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notice

notice of early piety. *They that seek me early, (says he) shall find me, Prov. viii. 17.* And it is observable, how much our Saviour was taken with the young man that came to him with some concern upon his spirit about eternity; *Jesus beholding him, loved him.*

2. In the time of affliction. The Lord says by the prophet Hosea, *I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early, Hos. v. ult.* It is observed of Manasseh, that when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem, which was his kingdom, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12.

13.

When people are carried aloft on the airy wings of worldly prosperity, it is hard to get good impressions either made or maintained upon their minds. The charms of the world makes their spirits airy and volatile, and dissipates their better thoughts. But when, in the course of providence, they are cast down from their excellency, and stripped of their gaudy trappings and their furniture, the mind is more easily inclined to reflection and consideration. And now is a proper season to seek a portion that fades not away. The prodigal never thought of returning to his father's house, until he had spent all his living, and was reduced to an extremity of misery. Then, and not till then, he came to himself, and did seek unto his father, and obtained his favour.

Lastly, Such a time as this is extremely proper for seeking

seeking of Christ. Ye have now both the word and sacrament; and in them both a crucified Christ is exhibited and set forth to your view. The sacrament is not, indeed, in its own nature a converting, but a confirming ordinance; yet many have got a gracious cast at occasions of this kind, when the word and sacrament are joined together, and have called the place *Peniel*. It is good to be in God's way; he sometimes surprizes such with a visit of mercy, as he did Zaccheus, who climbed up to a tree out of mere curiosity to see Christ passing by.

Fourthly, How shall we seek Christ?

1. We must seek him truly and sincerely, and not as the hypocrites, of whom he complains heavily, *Iſa. lviii. 3*, and downwards. Why, what was the matter with them? *Ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness*, ver. 4. They sought the Lord in the common course of religious duties; but they had their circle of sinning too, a course of abominations which they never broke off from: so their seeking of God was downright hypocrisy.

I am afraid there are many such seekers of Christ in the visible Church; they draw near to him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him, and their ways are grievous and abominable to him.

Many, like the Capernaïtes, seek Christ for the loaves, and not for himself. They seek Christ, and love Christ as a saviour from hell and wrath; but Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, they know not; Christ, made sanctification, they desire not; Christ saving from sin they cannot endure.

But if ye seek Christ, ye must seek him sincerely;

ye must seek a whole Christ, and not any part of him separate from the rest.

2. We must seek him affectionately, and with the whole heart, not in a cold indifferent manner. This way of seeking Christ is well exemplified in David, a man according to God's own heart, and a man in whom the spirit of devotion seems to have been in a very extraordinary measure. *As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee O God. Early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.* There is a warmth, sprightliness and vigour in these expressions, worthy to be admired and imitated. Christ says, *Give me thine heart*; and surely it can never be so well bestowed. And remember, whatever else ye give him, though ye should give him all your substance, yea, though ye should give all the members of your body to the fire for him, it would not be accepted without the heart.

3. We must seek him importunately. *Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.* There is a gradation here to be observed, implying, that an importunate search and enquiry is peculiarly acceptable. First *ask*, then *seek*, which implies more diligence and activity; then *knock*, which implies a kind of resoluteness to obtain what we want.

Take an example of importunate seeking from Jacob, who wrestled with God and prevailed. The Son of God says to him to try him, *Let me go, for the day breaketh.* Nay, says Jacob, If thou ask my leave and consent to part so, I'll never give it. Let the

the day break, and the next night come, the great Blessor, and lame halting Jacob, shall not part with Jacob's consent without a blessing. *I will not let thee go except thou bless me*, Gen. xxxii. 26.

Ye have likewise a famous example of this in the woman of Canaan. She comes to Christ, and cries, *O Lord, thou son of David*, (where observe her faith in his Messiahship and Godhead) *have mercy on me, for my daughter is grievously tormented with a devil*. But she meets with great discouragement, for Christ answered her not a word. Then it would seem she addressed his disciples, and she meets with a second discouragement; for they besought their Master, saying, *Send her away for she crieth after us*. One would have thought she might have given over, for the Master had never seemed to hear her, and the disciples cried to send her away. But she still persists, and Christ speaks; and behold she meets with a third repulse; for he says, *I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, whereas she was of the accursed race of the Canaanites; yet she came and worshipped him, saying, *Lord, help me*; and she meets with a fourth repulse, heavier than any of the former; for he calls her by the reproachful name of a dog. *It is not meet to take the childrens bread, and to cast it to dogs*. Truth, Lord, says she, thou hast hit me now; but be it so; I am a dog, the dogs may eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Naaman the Syrian was such a dog as I, Rahab the Harlot was a dog such as I, yet they obtained mercy; and why may not I obtain it also.

Our Lord carries the trial no further, but grants her request, professing his admiration of her faith;

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O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt.

4. We must seek him diligently, as Onesiphorus sought Paul at Rome, 1 Tit. i. 18. *He sought me out diligently and found me.* Some of the Roman prisoners were suffered to go abroad all the day fettered; but they returned to the prison at night. If Paul had been kept close in the prison, he might have been easily found out, but having liberty in the day-time, he behoved to be diligently sought for.

The woman in the parable, who lost a piece of silver, is supposed to light the candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it. Luke xv. 8.

If then ye would find Christ, ye must not fold your hands, and recline your head, but ye must get up and bestir yourselves with all diligence, in the use of all the means and ordinances in and by which Christ uses to be found of them that seek him.

Mind the diligence of the spouse in seeking of Christ, and imitate it. She arose and went about the city, in the streets, and in the broad ways, seeking him whom her soul loved. Go ye and do so likewise, and ye will certainly find him, Song iii. 3, 4.

5. We must seek him constantly, in opposition to the hypocrite, of whom it is said, *Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God? Seek his face continually* (says David) *wait on the Lord and keep his way.* Do not fret, faint, or weary in seeking him, though ye should not for some time succeed so well as ye would wish. Great men will be waited on, and are very cheerfully waited on by their votaries and dependants; and will not ye wait

wait upon the great God? Will ye not seek his Son until ye find him, and until he manifest himself to you, and satisfy your souls with his loving kindness and tender mercy?

Secondly, I now proceed to shew, that such as seek a crucified Jesus, have no reason to be afraid, but should be of good courage: for,

1. They are in the way of duty, and that is a safe way, in which there can be no real danger, though people may apprehend it. *He that walketh uprightly*, says Solomon, *walketh surely*. The way of duty is the way to peace and comfort, the way to heaven and happiness; it is the king's broad way, and all those who walk in it have his protection.

I know people walking in God's way may meet with heavy discouragements, as Jacob did, when he was returning at God's call to the land of his fathers. And on the other hand, people walking out of God's way may meet with outward encouragements. Peevish Jonah would not go to Nineveh when God bids him, but he will go to Tarshish; and behold he finds a ship as ready as he to carry him out of God's way. But if those meet with heavy afflictions who are in the way of their duty, they shall at the same time have the consolations of God's spirit, and the testimony of their own spirits to rejoice in: and in the end, they shall find that he has done all things well.

If then thou art seeking Christ, be not afraid, be not discouraged; thou art just doing what Christ would have thee to do, and what he would bid thee do.

2. Because they have the promise of finding him.
I love them that love me: and they that seek me early shall

shall find me. And ye shall find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

Pluck up your spirits, ye that seek a crucified Jesus. Why are ye discouraged? Why ly ye thus upon your faces? The vision is yet for an appointed time; it will speak and will not tarry. The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come unto you. He has promised to be found of you; and he is not a man that he should lie.

There was never man nor woman sought him sincerely, but who also found him according to his promise.

USE I. O believing communicants, see here both your duty and your comfort. *First*, Here is your duty, even to seek Jesus which was crucified. As the Lord said to Elijah in the cave, *What doest thou here, Elijah?* So say I, what doest thou here if thou art not seeking Jesus?

I hope ye have already found him; but are there not many things ye want upon this occasion, for which ye must seek unto him? Do not ye want more grace and holiness, more of the image of God? Do not ye want strength against your corruptions, particularly such of them as more easily beset you? Do not ye want victory over the world, and over Satan the god of this world, and your utter enemies? Yea, surely, ye want all this, and much more than all this. Why then, seek Christ, and ye shall have all things in him.

Secondly, Here is comfort in your duty. Are ye seeking Christ? Why then, be not afraid; he will be found of you. If ye be seeking Christ, Christ is seeking

seeking you; and where two folks are seeking one another, they will in all probability meet.

But oh, how shall I know that I have found Christ? *Ans.*

1. If ye have found him, ye will prize the discovery as a matchless display of glorious free grace. How would the malefactor on the scaffold prize a pardon sent to him? How would the hungry thirsty traveller rejoice to find a covered table in the wilderness?

2. If ye have found him, ye will love and esteem him above all things, Mat. xiii. 45, 46. Phil. iii. 8.

3. If ye have found him, ye will endeavour to hold him, like the spouse, Cant. iii. 4.

USE II. Christless, graceless sinners, I invite and intreat you to seek Jesus which was crucified.

Ist, Christ is seeking you, and would gladly have you. If ye ask what evidence is there for that, I answer, he came to seek and to save that which was lost; but ye are lost and undone, therefore he comes to seek and to save you.

Has not Christ set up his standard among you by the preaching of the gospel? Has he not commanded us to preach repentance and remission of sins in his name to you? And is not that an evidence of his seeking you. Nay, sinner, that Bible in thy hand is an evidence that Christ seeks you; for in it he speaks as really and particularly to thee, as if there were not another besides thee in all the world.

Again, have ye no evidence within your breasts that Christ seeks you? Do not ye sometimes feel the strivings of the Spirit, the stings and remorse of conscience, which oftentimes put thee to a stand?

Wherefore is he at all this pains with you, but that he seeks your salvation.

2dly, Seek Christ; for ye will never find a rest to your guilty consciences, or to your wandering hearts any where else for ever. As nothing can satisfy the panting thirsty heart but the water brooks, so nothing but the blood of Christ can pacify the guilty conscience.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N : XVI.

The Nature of finding CHRIST explained, and the Privileges enjoyed by those who have found him opened up.

JOHN i. 41. *We have found the Messias ; which is, being interpreted, the Christ.*

IN the last discourse I endeavoured to open up that great duty and privilege, of seeking a crucified Christ, from these words, Mat. xxviii. 5. Seeking and finding are connected together, as the precept and the promise, the duty and the reward. If ye have been really seeking Christ, as ye were directed, ye have been well employed, and I hope not altogether without success; and ye will desire to hear something about finding him.

The words read, give us occasion to discourse on this subject, which follows naturally upon the former. *We have found the Messiah, &c.*

John Baptist, Christ's immediate forerunner, had two of his disciples standing with him; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he says in their hearing, *Behold the Lamb of God*, ver. 36. The Lord so far blessed this verbal testimony of John to his disciples, that they presently followed Jesus. One of the two who heard John speak, was Andrew Simon Peter's

brother. He was concerned to get his brother acquainted with Christ; therefore he, and probably the other disciple, went both together in search of Peter; but Andrew first found him. Hence observe, the grace of God in the heart gives one a kindly concern for the salvation of others. Andrew got acquainted with Christ, and he cannot be easy till he get his brother acquainted with him also. Paul's heart's desire and prayer to God for his countrymen, was not the restoration of the worldly kingdom to them, or that all their enemies might be subdued under their feet, but that they might be saved; saved with a spiritual and eternal salvation, Rom. x. i. When Agrippa said to him, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*, he answers with great good will and concern for the king's soul, and the souls of those who were with him, *I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds*, Acts xxvi. 28, 29. If a man's riches and wealth increase, he grows more covetous and envious; he would engross all to himself, and cannot bear any to be above him, or equal with him. The world contracts the hearts of its children, and makes them narrow spirited, selfish and invidious. But the grace of God has just the contrary effect; it dilates, widens and opens the heart where it dwells; so that truly gracious persons earnestly desire, that all others were partakers of the same grace with themselves, and will use all proper means to bring them unto the possession thereof. Andrew here seeks his brother, and brings him to Christ.

The words of my text, are Andrew's joyful and triumphant

triumphant speech to his brother upon finding him; *We have found the Messiah; which is, being interpreted, the Christ.* The word Messiah is Hebrew; and being turned into Greek, it is Christ; and both these words being turned into our language, signify the same thing, viz. the Anointed. The particle *the*, in this place is emphatical, and not merely propo-
 sitive. He is the, or that anointed, by way of eminency. Other kings, prophets and priests, were anointed; yea, all the people of God are called his anointed; but he was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows, and received not the Spirit in measure.

This word, *eureka*, is made famous by Archimedes the mathematician, who, in a great passion, between glorying and rejoicing, first cried out so, when he had found the secret of king Hiero's crown; but much more famous by Andrew, in the text, who, upon the finding of Christ, came running to Peter with Archimedes his word; we have found him, we have found him.

In discoursing farther on these words, I will *first* shew what it is to find Christ: and *secondly*, what they find who find Christ, that fills them with such joy and triumphant boasting.

As to the *first* of these, what it is to find Christ, I take it up in two things.

1st, There is a saving discovery of Christ made unto the soul; and the soul sees him in such a light as it never saw him in before, which makes it cry out with Andrew, I have found him, I have found him: and behold, *He is altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand*, Cant. v. 16.

There

There is an objective discovery of Christ made in the gospel, to all that hear it. There he is held forth and exhibited, in his glorious person, natures, offices, and graces, as the great propitiation through faith in his blood; as the only mediator betwixt God and man; as the way, the truth, and the life, through whom alone sinners can come unto the Father. But though the sun shine in his meridian brightness and splendor, they that are blind cannot see it. And thus it is with sinners; the god of this world hath blinded their minds, that they cannot behold Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, shining in the dispensation of the gospel.

But there is an internal subjective discovery of Christ made in, and unto the soul, that finds him by the Holy Ghost. This Paul experienced at his conversion; and speaks of it, Gal. i. 15. 16. *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me; that I might preach him among the Heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.* The particle *in* is emphatic: Christ is revealed unto all that hear the gospel; but he is only revealed in them that believe. A ray of heavenly light darts upon their minds, and dispels the thick darkness which formerly overshadowed them, and makes them to discern Jesus Christ in his superlative beauty, brightness, glory, and excellency. The apostle Paul, at his conversion, had not only his bodily sight restored unto him, but the eyes of his understanding were enlightened; for he was filled with the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to discover Christ unto the soul, and to form Christ in the soul.

Now

Now, the mind being thus enlightened, it discerns in Christ three things :

1. A transcendent glory and excellency in him ; whereas, formerly, it saw no form nor comeliness in him, for which it should desire him ; and therefore despised and rejected him. Now the man sees a glory in his holy, though humble and mean birth ; in his righteous life, and in his bloody death : instead of being ashamed of the cross, which was, and is the great stumbling block to the world, he glorys in it, and desires to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified : what formerly he thought a blemish in Christ, he now esteems as a shining beauty.

2. A suitableness in Christ, both to the glory of God, and to its own case in particular. When once the sinner's eyes are opened to behold the abominable nature, and the dreadful demerit of sin, he begins to think how he can be saved, in a way suited unto the honour of the divine perfections. Sin is a breach of the law of God ; it is injurious to his justice and righteousness ; and such is his holiness, that he can have no communion with sinners : and the word of truth is already gone out of his mouth, *the soul that sinneth shall die*. How then can sinners be saved, in a consistency with God's perfections ? Why, the soul finding Christ, discovers in him a suitableness unto all the divine perfections ; so that, in and through him, mercy and truth shall meet together, and righteousness and peace shall embrace one another. He who was not subject to the law, shall be made under the law, and magnify and make it more honourable by his obedience unto it, than it would have been by the continued obedience of saints
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and angels through eternity. He who knew no sin, shall be made sin; and he who is the fountain of blessing, shall be made a curse, that we may be made the righteousness of God in him; and that we may be redeemed from the curse of the law, and obtain the blessing.

But then, the soul finding Christ, finds in him a suitableness unto its own particular case and circumstances. We never saw one thing answer another so exactly, as the Saviour does the sinner; and those who find him, are made very sensible of this: they are poor and miserable, he has riches unsearchable: they are weak and foolish, in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom: they are guilty and bound over to death, he is the great propitiary sacrifice: they are unholy; yea, all as an unclean thing, he is without spot and blameless; and he is made unto them sanctification: they are in bondage to their enemies, he is a King able to subdue them.

3. An ability and willingness to save. The soul finding Christ, not only finds one who is able to save to the uttermost, but one who is as willing as he is able. The soul discerns good will and kindness in Christ, towards itself in particular; as Paul did, 1 Tim. i. 15. *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*

Sinners, under deep convictions, are ready to hesitate on Christ's willingness, saying, will he ever be merciful to such a vile sinner as me? But when there is a full discovery of Christ made to the soul, the objection is removed; and the soul discerns good will
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and kindness towards itself, in the face of Jesus Christ.

2. This saving discovery of Christ being made to the soul, immediately the soul closes with him, and is united unto him by the Spirit and faith. *They that know thy name will put their trust in thee*, Psal. ix. 10. *If thou knewest the gift of God---thou wouldest have asked of him*, John iv. 10. The soul finding Christ, says of him, *This is my rest, and here will I abide. He is my righteousness, my rock, my refuge, my portion, for time and for eternity.*

I proceed, *secondly*, to shew, what they find who find Christ, that fills them with such joy and triumphant boasting. And,

1. They who find Christ, find life. Prov. viii. 35. *For who so findeth me, findeth life; and shall obtain favour of the Lord.* How greedily would a drowning man grip at a rope thrown into him to pull him out? how would the malefactor upon the scaffold, rejoice at the king's pardon being sent to him? How much more must the sinner, who saw himself bound with the cords of death and damnation, rejoice to have them loosed. The judge said unto him, *thou shalt surely die*, and he looked for nothing else; but Christ has said unto him, *thou shalt live and not die.*

They who find Christ, find a life of justification. The law's condemnatory sentence is repealed, and its obligatory bond cancelled: they are declared righteous, on the account of his righteousness imputed unto them, and they are adjudged unto eternal life. They find a life of sanctification: the seeds, habits, and principles of grace, are implanted in their hearts by

the Holy Ghost; so that from thenceforth they live unto God, and unto his Son Jesus Christ.

They find a life of inward comfort. Christ says to the justified sinner, as David's men said to Nabal, *Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast*, 1 Sam. xxv. 6. None have such cause to lead a joyful life, as those who have found Christ; for they have peace with God and eternal life: all things are theirs, and all things shall work together for their good.

They find a life of glory. John x. 28. *I give unto them eternal life.* This life of glory is begun in their regeneration, and carried on in their gradual sanctification. Heaven is brought down to their souls; and when their souls are carried up into heaven, and *when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory.*

2. They who find Christ find liberty. *In whom we have redemption through his blood*, Eph. i. 7. Christ himself says, *If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed*, John viii. 36. Life is very uncomfortable without liberty. How would it embitter life, to be always in prison and in chains; but if it could give one joy, just to be brought out of prison and set at liberty, how much more would one rejoice, to be brought out of prison to reign, as Solomon speaks? What a heavy life had the Jews in Babylon for seventy years, being in bondage to a foreign enemy; and *how was their mouth filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing, when the Lord turn'd again their captivity*, Psal. cxxvi. 2. Then they cried, *The Lord hath done great things for us: whereof we are glad*, ver. 3. I remember it is said
of

of the Grecians, that when Titus Flaminius had restored their ancient liberties, and proclamation was made thereof by an herald, they so pressed to hear it, that the herald was in great danger of being squeezed to death among the people; but when the proclamation was ended, there were heard such shouts and acclamations, that the very birds of the air fell down astonished with the noise, while they continued to cry, a saviour, a saviour.

My brethren, that thralldom and bondage from which Christ delivers us, is much greater and more dreadful, than that from which Titus delivered the Greeks. Sinners are bond slaves to a foreign prince, a prince of another nature than themselves; they are shut up in the prison of a natural state, and bound with many bands and fetters: but finding Christ, they find liberty; he knocks off their chains and fetters, opens the prison doors, and says to them, Go forth, ye are free. Oh then, how much are they bound to shew forth the praises of him, who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light!

3. They who find Christ, find a treasure. The kingdom of heaven, *i. e.* the gospel, or Christ in the gospel, *is like unto a treasure hid in a field; this which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field, Matth. xiii. 44.*

There are several things in the notion of a treasure, which agree very well unto Jesus Christ. Thus, for example, there is preciousness in the notion of a treasure; things treasured up are precious, either in their own nature, or in the esteem of those who make them their treasure. How well does this a-

gree to Jesus Christ! he is precious in himself, and likewise unto them that believe. They who find him, find the pearl of great price; the plant of renown; the altogether lovely object; the most valuable blessing that heaven can bestow, or mankind receive.

There is riches in a treasure. Worldly men treasure up riches and wealth as their portion; but who so find Christ, find the richest treasure that can be conceived. Hence we read of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and of all fulness dwelling in him.

These riches do not consist of silver and gold, which are perishing things, and unsuitable to the soul; but they are spiritual and eternal riches, riches of grace, and riches of mercy, and riches of glory.

Again, there is hiddenness in a treasure. Things treasured up are secret and hidden from the world. Christ is the treasure hid in the field of the gospel; he is a veiled beauty which few have eyes to discern; he is a mystery in his person, offices, and grace; the blind world know him not at all; they who believe know him but in part; *but when that which is in part shall be done away, then that which is perfect shall come.*

And then, there is a variety in a treasure. And so those who find Christ, find a rich variety in him for their entertainment: here is food, here is cloathing, here are remedies for all diseases, salves for all sores; here are all the precious promises; here is armour for the day of battle, and comfort for the day of distress; here is wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

4. They who find Christ, find rest: he is the rest, wherewith

wherewith the weary may be caused to rest, and the refreshing; therefore he solemnly invites the weary world of mankind sinners unto him, saying, *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you for it is easy, and my burden for it is light,* Mat. xi. 28, 29. Now these who find Christ, find a threefold rest.

1st, They find a present rest to their consciences, Rom. v. 1. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.* When conscience is awakened by the terrors of the law, the sinner naturally seeks rest and peace in the law, by his reformation and obedience; but still the conscience is unpeaceable, for it is impure, and threatens the sinner with eternal wrath: but the sinner finding Christ, gets the thorn of guilt pulled out of his conscience; it is purified, and pacified, and instead of accusing and condemning him, it absolves, and clears, and comforts him.

2^{dly}, They find a present rest to the heart. The heart of man is a large and capacious thing, so that the whole creation cannot satisfy it; but it is still crying, give, give, and never says it is enough. *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing; that which is crooked cannot be made straight, that which is wanting cannot be numbered.* The world is such a lottery, that if a man were to draw through eternity, he would still draw blanks, and never draw the prize. But they who find Christ, find an immediate rest to the wandering unsatisfied heart. Now they are at a point, and will go no further: they say with the Psalmist, *And now O Lord, what wait I for; my hope is fixed on thee; this is my rest, and here I will abide.*

3^{dly}, They

3dly, They find a future eternal rest in heaven, Heb. iv. 9. *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.* They may have a restless life here, in respect of outward troubles and calamities; but heaven will make amends for all. And as meat relishes best with the hungry, and rest is most refreshing to the weary; so there will be a certain sweetness in the heavenly rest of the saints, after all their labours, and sorrows, and sufferings, which would not have been in it, if they had never endured these things.

5. They who find Christ, find a refuge. David tells us, that when he was in great distress, and all refuge failed him, he said unto the Lord, *Thou art my refuge*, Psal. cxlii. 4, 5. It is prophesied of the Messiah, that he *shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest: as rivers of waters in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land*, Isa. xxxii. 2. The justice of God pursues the sinner out of Christ; and when the sinner's eyes are opened to see the enemy and avenger hard at his heels, he cries, and flies, and knows not what to do: but finding Christ, he finds a refuge where he may be safe from the pursuer. And oh, how acceptable and refreshing is this refuge unto him! It is like the water brooks to the poor panting and braying hart, or the king's pardon to the malefactor upon the scaffold.

It is observable, that great pains was taken of old to make the way into the cities of refuge plain and patent. The magistrates of Israel were commanded to prepare the way unto them, as we see, Deut. xix. 3. And it is in allusion hereunto, that the Baptist calls

calls himself *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.* The roads leading to this city were to be more than thirty cubits broad; the hills in the way to them were to be levelled, the ditches to be filled up, and bridges laid over the waters; and, at the parting of the roads, there were statues erected with this inscription, *refuge, refuge*, and with a hand pointing to the city of refuge; that those who were flying to them might have nothing to retard their motion.

And no doubt, the first sight of one of those cities would be very rejoicing to the heart of a poor man, who having slain one unawares, was flying thither: even so the poor convinced contrite sinner, hotly pursued by avenging justice, rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory, to find Christ, the great refuge of heaven's estimation for people in those circumstances.

6. They who find Christ, find a portion. When David found himself cast off at all hands, he cried unto the Lord, *Thou art my portion in the land of the living*, Psal. cxlii. 6. The double portion of goods moveable, was one of the rights of primogeniture among the Jews; and so all those who are members of the general assembly and church of the first-born, having Christ for their portion, have the double portion. It is not a portion of silver and gold, houses or lands; all these things fade away and perish with the using; but it is a portion that will out-live all the clay portions of the world's children: it is a crown of glory that fades not away; an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled; it is a soul-enriching, satisfying and up-making portion for time and eternity.

Lastly,

Lastly, They who find Christ, find all things in him necessary to their eternal happiness and welfare. Read the eighth chapter to the Romans, and there you have an inventory of your privileges in and by Jesus Christ. *Whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas or the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

The things of the world answer their respective ends and purposes for which they were designed; but Jesus Christ is profitable for all things: in him we are compleatly furnished with every thing necessary for our eternal well.

USE I. Let us see, acknowledge, and applaud the happiness of those who have found Christ. Let us say, Happy is the people in such a case! *Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord.* They have found life, they have found liberty, a treasure, a rest, a refuge, a portion, all things necessary for their eternal happiness. Is it possible for us to figure in our own minds a person or people in better circumstances?

Ye that are merry jovial persons in the world, think not religion a melancholy exercise; count not the saints of the Most High to be of all men the most miserable: they are satisfied with their lot and portion, yea, rejoice and glory in it, and would not exchange with you for a thousand worlds.

2. Search and try, examine yourselves whether ye have found Jesus Christ? Ye were lately making a very solemn profession of seeking a crucified Jesus, while ye sat down at his table. How have ye succeeded? Have ye found him? Consider,

1st, If ye have found him, ye will prize the discovery

covery, and be highly transported with it. Archimedes was so highly transported with finding out the secret of Hiero's crown, that he cryed out, *Eureka, Eureka*. Augustine was so transported with the discovery of the truth, in his dispute with the Manicheans, that he clapt upon the table, and cryed, *Conclusum est contra Manicheos*. If the discovery of natural or moral truth is so transporting, how much more transporting must the discovery of him who is the truth itself be! Ye will say within yourselves, I was seeking asses, and behold I have found a kingdom; I was wandering in the search of happiness, now I have found it; I was a dog under the table, now I sit among the children at the table; I was feeding on dust with the serpent, and on husks with the swine, now I have found the hidden manna, the bread of life which came down from heaven.

2dly, If ye have found him, ye will love and esteem him above all things.

The merchant man seeking goodly pearls, when he had found the pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it, Mat. xiii. 46. People may judge of their state by the habitual current of their affections. What is it ye love and esteem most of all? Is it Christ or the creatures, heaven or earth, the seen or the unseen world.

3dly, If ye have found him, ye will have got other views of sin and of yourselves, than ever ye had before.

Manifestations of the glory of Christ, are ever attended with humbling discoveries of the nature of sin. When Job had seen the Lord, he cries out, *Behold I am vile; I abhor myself, and repent in dust*

and in ashes: and Ifaiah, upon the same occasion cries out, *Wo is me, for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips*, Job xlii. 5, 6. Isa. vi. 5.

4thly, If ye have found him, ye will earnestly desire greater and farther discoveries of him; ye will say with Moses, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory*, Exod. xxxiii. 18. Moses had often before this time seen the glory of the Lord; the Lord had talked with him face to face, as a man talks with his friend. But communion with God is one of those things which never cloy or wearies the soul; therefore he cries out, with as great earnestness as ever, *I beseech thee, shew me thy glory*.

Lastly, Irregenerate sinners, living without God in the world, I exhort you to seek Christ, and not to give over the search until ye find him.

1. Consider what a great mercy it is, that God will be found of you. He will not be found of the fallen angels; he will not be found of the damned in hell; but he will be found of you, if you will seek him with all your heart.

2. If ye will not seek him now, the time will come when ye shall seek him and he will not be found of you. So he has threatned, Prov. i. 24. and downwards, *Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hands and no man regarded. I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me*.

S E R M O N XVII.

The Mysteries of the G O S P E L illustrated.

C O L. i. 26. Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages, and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.

IN these words you will observe, (1.) What the gospel is; it is a mystery. The word signifies a hidden thing, which cannot be seen so long as it is hid. It comes from a word which signifies to shut or stop the mouth from dwalging. Among the Heathens they had their greater and lesser mysteries, which they were under the most sacred engagements not to discover. Therefore, there was an image before their temples, with its finger upon its mouth, to shew, that the worshippers were to be silent, and to make no discovery of the mysteries transacted within. And indeed, the mysteries of the Heathens were so shameful and profane, that they did well to forbid the discovery of them. They were a mystery of iniquity, as the apostle calls the antichristian synagogue; but the gospel is a mystery of godliness. (2.) This mystery of the gospel was hid from ages and from generations. It lay hid in the breast of God from eternity; and during all the ages that preceded Christ's coming in the flesh, it was hid altogether from the greatest part of the world, and but ob-

scurely revealed to the Old-Testament church. (3.) This mystery of the gospel is now made manifest to his saints. It is true, the external revelation of the gospel is made promiscuously to saints and sinners; but the internal and saving manifestation of it, is peculiar to the saints, or holy ones, as the word signifies. Holiness is the distinguishing badge of Christians; *they are a holy nation*, 1 Pet. ii. 9.

In discoursing farther from this subject, I propose, through divine assistance, to enquire why the gospel is called a mystery. This epithet is freely bestowed upon it, and with great variety of expressions: it is called the mystery of God and of Christ, the mystery of his will, the mystery of faith, and the mystery of godliness. Now the gospel is called a mystery for these reasons:

1st, Because it is a hidden thing, which could never have been known, either by angels or men, unless it had been revealed unto them. It is, as the apostle speaks, *the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*, 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8. And as for the angels, though they excel in knowledge as well as in strength, yet they know nothing of this mystery but by revelation; yea, they are willing to learn it of the Christian churches; therefore they frequent our worshipping assemblies. *For unto principalities and powers is made known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God*, Eph. iii. 10.

2. Because the main wheels of it turn upon such plain and simple events, as are truly amazing. Who, that had seen an infant of a span long, born of a poor

poor woman in a stable, cradled in a manger, growing up, and living a great many years in the world, in such poverty as that he had not where to lay his head, attended only by a few poor illiterate fishermen, who called themselves his disciples, at length nailed to a cross, amidst two thieves, and from thence taken down and laid in a grave? who, I say, that had seen all this, could have imagined, that upon such low, plain and simple events, the wisdom and goodness of God, for the redemption of the world, would have turned? But so it was, and so it is: *Christ crucified, though a stumbling block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness, is to them that are saved, the wisdom of God, and the power of God.*

God's ways are not as mans ways, nor his thoughts as man thoughts. It is a piece of the mystery of providence, to raise the greatest things from the smallest and meanest beginnings. Abraham is called out of an idolatrous family, in Ur of the Chaldees; goes childless for a long time; yet from this man sprung there a nation, like the stars in heaven for multitude.

Jesus is born in a stable, and dies as a malefactor upon a cross; yet in a very short time after his death, his religion spread over all the world, not only without human aids, but in spite of all the opposition of men and devils. And thus was fulfilled the prediction of Isaiah, *A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation, Isa. lx. ult. This is the doing of the Lord, and it is wondrous in our eyes.* It is one of the ways of that God, *whose ways are in the seas, and his paths in the deep waters, and his footsteps are not known.*

3. Because, when it was revealed at first, it was revealed

revealed but unto few; the Jews only. In Judah's land God was known; but the rest of the world were left in ignorance. And though the Jews, absolutely considered, were a vastly numerous people, yet how small and inconsiderable were they, when compared with the world at large? And even unto the Jews themselves, it was but obscurely revealed, being wrapt up in types and ceremonies, predictions and promises, which the generality of them did not thoroughly understand. Hence, though particular persons under the Old-Testament, as David, Isaiah and others, had very clear views of the gospel, yet the generality of them who lived under that dispensation, had but the twilight, in comparison of us who live under the Christian dispensation.

4. Because, when it is externally revealed in the church, it is still a mystery unto carnal men. Hence, the apostle tells the Corinthians, to whom he had preached the gospel, *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.* These whom he calls lost here, are not such as never heard the gospel; but such as though they heard it, they would not believe it. The external and internal discovery of Christ, are two very different things; and the former, without the latter, serves only to aggravate one's guilt, and to justify one's condemnation. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned, 1 Cor. ii. 14.* The carnal man does not discern

cern the holiness, righteousness and wisdom of God, shining in the gospel-dispensation; nor is he affected with the infinite grace, love and condescension, appearing therein: he who speaks of these things is a Barbarian unto him: and how should it be otherwise? for the things are spiritual, but the man is carnal, and sold under sin.

5. Because there are mysteries in it, which the best among us cannot fully comprehend, in this imperfect state; therefore, says Paul, *for now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known*, 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

But why does the apostle change the person, saying, we see darkly, and then I know in part? I answer, to shew his humility and self-denial; and to encourage those Christians to whom he wrote, who might perhaps think, that though they saw but darkly, yet he saw fully and clearly. No, says the apostle, for all that I know, I know but in part. It is likely there never was on earth a merely human mind, more enlightened in the knowledge of the gospel than Paul was; yet in comparison of the light of glory, he saw but darkly as well as others.

For all the clamour and noise, which our modern infidels raise against the Christian religion, because of the mysteries contained in it, I am so far from being stumbled at it, on that account, that on the contrary, were there nothing of mysteries in this religion, nothing but what were perfectly plain, obvious and comprehensible, to my understanding, it would seem to me to want one great evidence of its coming from God. For is it not most natural to expect, that a
revelation

revelation from God to men in a state of trial, discipline and improvement, for a future state, should contain several things which they cannot fully comprehend, and therefore will prove a severe exercise to their minds.

To expect (says one) a distinct comprehensive view of the whole subject, clear of difficulties and objections, is to forget our nature and condition; neither of which admit of any such knowledge, with respect to any science whatever. And to enquire with this expectation, is not to enquire as a man, but as one of another order of creatures.

But if any say, what are the mysteries of the gospel which we cannot fully comprehend? I reduce them to these four general heads.

First, The Author of the gospel, Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate, is a mystery. So speaks the revered apostle of the Gentiles, 1 Tim. iii. 16. *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was made manifest in the flesh.* What an amazing, astonishing thing is this, that God should become man, and yet continue to be God? If all the angels of heaven had quit their posts about the throne, and crept up and down the earth in the form of worms, it would not have been half so astonishing, as the Word's being made flesh, and dwelling among us. An angel, the highest angel in heaven, and a worm creeping on the earth, agree in this, that they are both creatures; only the angel is a creature of higher rank. But in the incarnation, the Creator became a creature; God became man, the Word was made flesh; that the Ancient of Days should become an infant of days; that eternity should be born; immortality

mortality should become mortal, and mortal rise again from death and the grave; that the divine and human natures should be brought so near to one another, as to be united together in the one person of the Son. These are the deep things of God, which our shallow capacities cannot fully comprehend. But where comprehension fails, as it must do in these mysteries, let faith and holy admiration take place.

Secondly, The doctrines of the gospel are a mystery. Every one of them has something in it, which the carnal mind, while it continues such, can never comprehend. Hence, *the things of the Spirit of God* are said to be foolishness to the natural man, 1 Cor. ii. 14.

But there are some doctrines of the gospel which quite overwhelm and confound human reason, being far above it, though not contrary to it. Thus, for example, a trinity in unity, three in one, and one in three, is what we cannot comprehend. That it is so, we may, and ought to believe; but as to the particular *modus* of the mystery, we neither do, nor can understand.

The gospel informs us of three unions, each of them deep and mysterious as to the manner of them.

1. The *trinity* union, whereby three distinct persons subsist in one and the same individual essence.
2. The *hypostatical* union, whereby two distinct natures are united in the one individual person of the Son.
3. The *mystical* union betwixt Christ and believers, whereby he is the head, they the members; he the vine, they the branches.

Add to this the doctrine of God's decrees of election and predestination, of original sin, of the liberty

of the will of man, and the irresistibility of divine grace, the imputation of Adam's sin, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness: these things ly not level with corrupt reason; and therefore they have been the subject of many uncharitable debates and altercations among Christians.

Thirdly, The graces and duties of the gospel are a mystery. There is a mystery in faith, which is the leading grace. That the soul of man should be carried above itself, to believe supernatural truths, to depend on what he sees not, to walk by faith, not by sight, this is a mystery. That a man should be wholly changed and new moulded; that a man should be the same and not the same; the same man for soul and body, yet quite another man in regard of new principles, new qualifications and dispositions: there is a mystery here which Nicodemus, though a master in Israel, did not know; and therefore he talks the grossest nonsense upon the subject, *Can a man enter into his mother's womb a second time, and be born again*, John iii. 4.

That one, who in times past was proud, furious and revengeful, should, by the power of the gospel, become humble and self-denied, and meek as a lamb, leaving vengeance in the hands of him who has said *Vengeance is mine, and I will repay it*; that one who was ambitious, covetous and worldly minded, should be crucified to the world, and have his heart, hopes and expectations upon the upper world, that he should love what before he hated, and hate what before he loved, that his delight and joy should be in such things as before he despised; this is a marvellous change; a turning of things upside down. That a man should
be

be in the midst of trouble, and yet at rest in God; that he should stand like a rock, firm and immoveable, though the winds and waves of tribulations beat upon him from all airths; that a man should be so far moulded into a conformity to the divine will, as to have no more a will of his own, in opposition thereto; but in all things to will as God wills, to love as he loves, and hate as he hates; this, my brethren, is a wonderful metamorphosis; it is turning a lion into a lamb, and a dragon into a dove. Here lyes the mystery of the Christian life, which the world neither knows nor cares for.

Fourthly, The real believers of the gospel are a mystery; and that in two respects. 1. They are a mystery to the carnal world: therefore the world says of Christ's spouse, *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved?* They are surprized at her leaving that behind her, which they set heart and soul upon, viz. the world; they think it strange that she runs not with them into the same excess of riot, and speak evil of her. 2. They are many times a mystery to themselves. There are several oddities in their character which cannot be accounted for, but upon the principles of the gospel. Paul has a good number of them, 2 Cor. vi. 9, 10. *As unknown, and yet well known: as dying, and behold, we live: as chastened, and not killed: as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing: as poor, yet making many rich: as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.* They are split into an old and a new man. The old man cannot but sin; the new man sinneth not. Therefore says Paul, it is not I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

I proceed now to the second thing in the text, viz. the hiding of the mystery of the gospel from ages and from generations.

Some make a distinction betwixt these two words *ages* and *generations*, so as that the first should signify the gospel's being hid from eternity; the next, its being hid from so many generations of mankind as had passed through the world, until the birth of Christ.

Here three things must be considered, 1. From whom it was hid. 2. How or where it was hid. 3. Why it was hid.

First, From whom was the mystery of the gospel hid? *Ans.*

1st, It was hid from the angels. The apostle says, that the manifold wisdom of God was made known by the church unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, Eph. iii. 10. Though those spirits excel in knowlege as well as in strength, yet they could not have come to the knowlege of this mystery, unless it had been revealed unto them.

It is a dream to think, or say, that the gospel was revealed to the devils before their fall; for then their own fall and future misery, that they were to be kept eternally in chains of darkness on the same ground, must be revealed unto them. What horror and sadness must fill Adam's mind, and the angels, if hell, and the necessity of God manifested in the flesh, was revealed to them in the state of happiness. The glorious elect angels come in time to learn that manifold wisdom of God, and delight, in Peter's time, to look back into it, as to a great secret of God. We have no reason then to think this secret was so much as whispered in the ears of the devils before their fall.

2. It

2. It was hid from Adam in innocence, and some time after his fall also. That God would reveal the gospel to Adam before his fall, is what we have no manner of reason to suppose; for this was in plain terms to tell him of his fall, and so to fill him with such fear and anxiety, as were inconsistent with his happy state. It was likewise some little time after his fall before the promise was promulgated. And in that interval we find he was in great terror and anxiety; for he says to his Maker, *I was afraid, and I hid myself.*

3. It was hid from the Gentile world. For a long series of years, God suffered them to walk in their own ways: he gave them time to try what the law, what natural conscience and philosophical lectures on morality could do for their recovery. But by the utmost improvement of their reason, by all the sagacity of Athens, which was the centre of the heathen wisdom and learning, they could not find out the mystery of the gospel; for it was kept hid from them, under the lock and key of God's eternal purpose, 1 Cor. i. 21.

But though the gospel was hid from the Gentile world, for the space of four thousand years, we need not doubt, but in such a long period, and among so many generations, there were some particular persons brought to the knowledge of the one true God: of this sort was Melchizedeck, Job, and his friends. Besides, the Jews sometimes sent their missionaries to the nations, as Jonah was sent to Nineveh, to preach repentance to them; and they admitted proselytes from all nations. Nevertheless, the gospel was not published at large to the Gentiles, nor were they taken within the pale of the church, until the days of the apostles.

4. It

4. It was hid even from the Jews, though they were the only church of God in the world: hid from them not absolutely, but comparatively with the revelation that was made of it afterwards. And in this respect, the gospel is called a mystery. For, what is properly a mystery? It is not a thing absolutely hid, or wholly kept close, as that there is nothing said about it; but when there is that said about it, which doth obscurely and darkly reveal it, and yet hath a further meaning which comes afterwards to be opened. The apostle, quoting Adam's words concerning his wife, *They two shall be one flesh*, saith, *this is a great mystery*. Why, where is the mystery of it? Because, darkly, under the union of man and wife, was represented the union of Christ and his church. I speak, says Paul, concerning Christ and the church, Eph. iv. 32.

Secondly, Where was it hid? *Ans.*

1. It was hid in God. So the Scripture expression is, Eph. iii. 9. *And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ*. And it has a great emphasis. It was not only hidden by God, nor was it hidden merely with God, or laid beside him in the highest heavens, where he is said to dwell: nay, it was contained in a more glorious cabinet; for it was hid in God; that is to say, in the very heart of God, among his secret purposes and decrees; into which, neither angels nor archangels durst look. There it lay hid from eternity. Hence Solomon, speaking of the Messiah in the eighth of the Proverbs, as interpreters generally allow, says, verse 23. *I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was;*
and

and verse 31st, he declares how much he was pleased with the project and device of saving mankind, *Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.*

Now, the Son, considered absolutely as the second person, could not be set up by the Father; for he is co-essential, co-eternal, and co-equal with the Father; but he was from eternity set up, held and reputed by his Father as Mediator, the common head and representative of the elect, who, by virtue of this constitution, had a representative existence in him from eternity. And thus he may be said to have had his delights with the sons of men; for they had an existence in him beyond that of things merely possible. The Son of God was, from eternity, God-man contracted; but the consummation of his espousals with our nature, was not till the fulness of time, that he was made manifest in the flesh.

2. It was hid in promises. The first dawning of gospel light, the first glimpse of this mystery, was in a promise; I mean, the first promise made to the guilty pair shortly after their fall, that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. The whole mystery of Christ God-man, and the whole mystery of salvation wrought by him, was wrapped up in that first and great promise; and which of all others that ever God made, was longest in fulfilling, there being the distance of about four thousand years betwixt the publication and the accomplishment of it. This promise was afterwards renewed unto Noah, whom God had preserved to give beginning to a new world. Then it was renewed, enlarged and confirmed

confirmed with the solemnity of an oath unto Abraham.

3. It was hid in prophecies. Hence Peter says, *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, 1 Pet. i. 10. Unto them it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister.* They did not fully understand their own predictions; for they were but amanuenses or scribes unto the Holy Ghost, who wrote as he inspired them, and spoke as he gave them utterance. And although they had a general view of their predictions, yet it is natural to suppose, that the Holy Ghost, who enacted them, had several particular designs and purposes to accomplish in them, which they knew nothing about. For albeit those prophecies came first to the Jews, yet they were designed for the use of the church in all after-ages.

As for the generality of the Jews, they utterly misunderstood those prophecies; for their minds were blinded: and until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away, in the reading of the Old Testament. Though supernatural things have the principal place in the work of the Messiah, yet are they often prophesied of, and promised, in words whose first and literal sense denotes things temporal, earthly, and carnal. Thus, for example, the 60th chapter of Isaiah is a prophetic description of the kingdom of Christ; yet is it conceived in such words and phrases, as, literally taken, imply the greatest worldly grandeur and happiness. Now this was not only conformable to the Eastern way of writing, but it was necessary likewise, to give the infant church of the
Jews

Jews an understanding of, and an affection for, the spiritual things chiefly intended in those prophecies.

But, alas! they satisfied themselves with the husk and shell, neglecting the kernel; like children, they were fonder of the box, than of the diamond which it contained. Hence it was, that, when Jesus Christ came into the world full of grace and truth, and with the glory of the only begotten Son of God, they saw no form nor comeliness in him, but despised him, because he had not that outward pomp and worldly splendor, which, from a mistake of the ancient prophecies, they took to be the characteristics of the Messiah.

4. It was hid under various rites, types and figures. The whole ceremonial law pointed unto Jesus Christ, and had its accomplishment in him; which the apostle proves at large in his epistle to the Hebrews. Abraham's offering up his son Isaac, in the purpose and intention of his heart, Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, Jonah, his being in the belly of the whale, with several other instances that might be given, were all types and representations of the Messiah, and pointed out, though but obscurely, that mystery which is now made manifest to the saints. And as the prophets did not fully understand their own predictions, so neither did they fully understand many things whereof themselves were types. Thus, Noah and his household, saved in the ark, and the old world drowned, was a type of our baptism: the new man, in baptism, is saved, the old man is destroyed; yet Noah understood not this. The Israelites passing through the red sea, was a type of baptism; for Paul says, 1 Cor. x. 2. *And were all baptised unto*

Moses in the cloud, and in the sea: yet Moses understood not this. Jonah, his lying in the belly of the whale, was a type of Christ's being in the grave; yet Jonah knew it not. There were many things in Joseph's life typical of the Messiah, which yet the good man did not know. What reason have we to be thankful, that in the gospel, both the things signified, and the types, are revealed unto us.

Thirdly, Why was it hid? Why was the mystery of the gospel hid so long from the world? Why was the promised Messiah not exhibited till four thousand years after the world was laid in ruins by sin. *Ans.*

1st, The mystery of the gospel lay so long hid, to testify the divine displeasure against sin, and to make the world feel the bitter effects of it. The malignancy of a distemper appears the more, the longer the physician delays his coming. Had the atonement been made presently after the crime was committed, mankind would have been ready to think it was but a small matter, and that God was not much offended. But infinite mercy, and infinite wisdom, were sweetly tempered in this matter. For the promise of the Messiah being made, this gave ground of hope; and then the coming of the Messiah being so long delayed, this gave them occasion to reflect bitterly on sin, as that which had so provoked God, as that he might justly have withheld the deliverer altogether, and sent the transgressors to the pit of destruction.

2dly, That it might be the more prized and valued, when it should be manifested at last. We embrace our returning friend with the greater joy that we have long expected his coming. Mercies long prayed for, hoped for, and expected, have a double relish

relish when at length they come. About the time of our Saviour's birth, there were some good people who looked for redemption in Jerusalem, and waited for the consolation of Israel. Among these was Anna the prophetess, and good old Simeon, who came into the temple, took the babe in his arms, and fell into such an ecstasy of joy, that he would gladly have died on the spot, died with the great God Messiah in his arms. Hear his swan-like song, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*

3dly, That the world might have time to try what they could do without it towards their own recovery, and thereby be convinced, that the coming of the Messiah was absolutely necessary for that effect. They got time to see that philosophy and learning, human laws and institutions, riches and wealth, valour and renown, and all means they could ever fall on, were utterly insufficient to reform the world, and bring them to the knowledge of the one true God. Hence Paul says, 1 Cor. i. 21. *For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.* God did not leave himself without witness in the Gentile world: there were, from time to time, many brave, gallant, and great men raised up among them, who taught surprising things, concerning the Deity and Morality, considering what disadvantages they laboured under. But they never could bring men to the knowledge of God in Christ; nor could they give them a perfect system of morals for their lives: moreover, they were perpetually contradicting one another; their testimony concerning virtue and vice did not a-

gree: what one called a virtue, another called a vice; and when one bade do this, another bade not do it. Finally, they wanted a proper commission and sufficient authority for reforming the world. Thus the insufficiency of all human means being made to appear, it was full time for the Son of God to appear. Accordingly, he was made manifest in the flesh, and manifested to the world, the mystery which had been hid from ages and from generations.

4thly, To exercise the faith, hope and patience of the church. The first gospel promise was the foundation of their hope; but then the long delay of its accomplishment was a fore trial to their hope: for as the wise man says, *Hope deferred, maketh the heart sick*. And sometimes they met with providential incidents, that seemed to be against the accomplishment of it. For example, not long after the promise was made to our first parents, they met with a very shocking scene in their family, which also had a very threatening aspect on the accomplishment of the promise: for of two sons that they had, the one, and the best too, was murdered; and the survivor was rejected of God, and cursed. And long after that, when the promise was renewed to Abraham, with this addition, *That in Isaac his seed should be called*, he is commanded to take this son of the promise and slay him upon an altar: the which command seemed absolutely to frustrate the promise. To the eye of sense, it looked like killing the Christ, and so depriving the world of a saviour. But in this terrible conflict, his faith shewed its valour, and was victorious.

We now proceed to the third thing in the text, viz. The manifesting this mystery of the gospel unto his saints. Here

Here, *first*, we will consider the character of the persons unto whom the mystery is manifested:---They are his saints, or holy ones, as the word signifies. It is the common appellation of the New-Testament Christians. The epistles are inscribed to the saints and faithful, in such and such places. It was of old, and is still a name of scorn and contempt in the world: but they who truly deserve that name, are precious and honourable in the sight of the Lord, living and dying.

There are three things which must concur to make up the character of a saint, according to the scripture; and if any one of them be wanting, the character is incomplete; purity of heart, of lip, and of life.

1. Purity of heart. *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? A very weighty question indeed! He that hath clean hands and a pure heart*, Psal. xxiv.

4. And our Saviour, in his sermon on the mount, confirms David's decision in this point, while he says, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*, Matth. v. 8. Now there is a twofold purity, *viz.* a legal and an evangelical purity, both of them competent to the saints, but in different circumstances. A legal, absolute, and spotless purity, is the attainment of the saints in glory; who are therefore called the spirits of just men made perfect: but it is not attainable by saints on earth: *for there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not*, Eccles. vii. 20.: yet they are saints, and that by an evangelical purity: they are sincere, upright, and without guile before the Lord: they have undergone a work of regeneration, which has produced an universal, though

though imperfect change upon them: they are new creatures, babes in Christ, but advancing by degrees to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.

2. Purity of lip. *With the mouth confession is made unto salvation*, as, *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*, Rom. x. 10. Wherever there is true faith, there must be a profession made of it before the world, for the glory of God, and the edification of others. One may be a professor, and one of the strictest sort too, and yet be no saint: but one cannot be a saint without a profession, more than one can live without breathing. Therefore, saints having faith in Christ, must not hide it in a napkin, as if they cared not for it, or were ashamed of it; but they must openly and avowedly profess it before the world. I am a Christian, was the word in the primitive times, when they were arraigned before the Heathen emperors, and they boasted and gloried in the name.

3. Purity of life. *He that shall ascend into the bill of the Lord, must have clean hands* attending the pure heart, Psal. xxiv. 4. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. It is very true, morality alone will not carry any person to heaven; but it is no less true, that none shall ever get to heaven without it. I cannot esteem those people to be saints of the Most High, who are, in the course of their lives, slaves to the devil and their own lusts. Should a man pray like a saint, and profess like a saint; yet if his practice is like a Pagan or a prophane person, that man's religion is vain; he is an arrant hypocrite: and when he comes at last with others, crying, *Lord, Lord,*
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open unto us, the answer will be, I know you not whence you are; depart from me ye cursed.

Such persons may be saints in their own opinion, and in the opinion of others; but they are not his saints: as it is in the text, they are not the saints of the Most High. Antichrist's saints they may be, for many such has he enrolled among the number; but Christ's saints they are not, nor can be, while they remain such.

I would observe further, that by saints here, we are not to understand the apostles only, though they were saints of the first rank; but the community of the faithful; the whole household of them in their successive generations. The mystery of the gospel was manifested to the apostles, for the sake of his saints, that they might manifest it unto them: yea, my brethren, had it not been for his saints, the world had never heard a syllable of the gospel. Wherever there were saints, thither the apostles behoved to go, and manifest the mystery to them: And the more saints there were in any place, they stayed so much the longer. Paul stays eighteen months at Corinth; and why? Because the Lord had much people in that city.

I shall, *secondly*, Shew what of this mystery is made manifest to his saints,

1. The holiness of the mystery is manifested unto them. What is the gospel, my brethren? It is the great mystery of godliness, or of holiness. The gospel has the very same motto that Aaron had upon his forehead, *Holiness to the Lord*. All its doctrines, precepts, promises, ordinances and institutions, are pure

pure and holy, and have a native tendency to promote holiness in all those who receive them.

The holiness of God shines in the law, that has terrible threatnings annexed to it: it shines in the terrible judgments which he sometimes executes upon sinners before the world. But in the gospel, the divine holiness shines more illustriously than any where else. There we see God not sparing his holy One, his only Son, when standing in the room of sinners; but pouring out his wrath upon him to the uttermost, even till he cried out, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Methinks, the Christian, by faith, looking to Christ hanging on the cross, a sacrifice for our sins, may cry out with the men of Bethshemesh, *Who is able to stand before the holy Lord God?* 1 Sam. vi. 19.

2. The wisdom of the mystery is manifested unto them. The gospel is the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which none of the princes of the world knew: yea, it is the manifold wisdom of God, as Paul declares, 1 Cor. ii. 7. Eph. iii. 10.: it is a wisdom of many plies and folds: here is a wheel within a wheel. The wisdom of God appears in the creation of all things, and in that wonderful providence whereby they are preserved and governed; but in the gospel, which declares the redemption of the world, there is a heighth and depth of wisdom which neither angels nor men can fully comprehend. It is God's master-piece, if I may so express it: it is the most finished piece of all his workmanship, and will subsist when the whole fabric of nature will be consigned over to devouring flames.

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The world sees no wisdom in this mystery; yea, they account it folly. But that is nothing wonderful; for a blind man cannot see the sun. But the wisdom of the mystery is made manifest unto his saints: they see such a suitableness in the plan of redemption to all the purposes of the divine glory, and to all the necessities and wants both of saints and sinners;---they see such a harmony betwixt mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, that they are quite astonished; and in their astonishment they cry out, *O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

3. The wonderful power and efficacy of the mystery are manifested unto them. Paul says, *We preach Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God*, 1 Cor. i. 24. And he tells the Romans, that he was *not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*: and why? For, says he, *It is the power of God unto salvation*, Rom. i. 16.

The world saw the amazing power of the gospel when it was first published, and many thousands were made to feel it: for the Lord gave testimony to the word of his grace in the mouth of his apostles. Like a mighty torrent, it carried all before it, and prevailed in spite of the power of the magistrate, the wisdom of the philosophers, the craft of statesmen, the bigotry of priests, and the most inveterate prejudices of the people.

They who embraced the gospel, felt the wonderful power of it in changing their hearts, their principles, and their lives; *in opening their eyes, turning them from darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God*. And unto this very day,

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when any are converted by the gospel, they are made to feel an exceeding greatness of power, such as was put forth on Christ when he was raised from the dead: and therefore, such as is absolutely irresistible, Psal. cx. 3. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.* Hebrew, *Willingnesses.*

4. The grace and mercy of the mystery are manifested unto them. *But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ,* Ephes. ii. 4, 5. In the Heathen mysteries, there were some cruel and barbarous, as well as obscene and filthy rites. But the gospel is a mystery of grace, love and kindness to mankind: that he should lay down his life for his enemies; that he should restore that which he took not away; that the servant should commit the fault, and the master submit to the stripes; herein is love, love without precedent or parallel: it stands unexampled in the annals of time, and will stand so in the annals of eternity. Now the mystery of this love is manifested to the saints; the Holy Ghost sheds it abroad in their hearts, and they are enabled, in some measure, to comprehend the height, depth, breadth and length of it.

5. The riches of the mystery are manifested unto them. Paul says it with a world of triumph and joy, *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,* Ephes. iii.

8. And in the verse following our text, he says, *To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles.* Now, the

the riches of the gospel are manifested unto the saints, not for their contemplation only, or that they may see them, as stewards and cash-keepers for merchants see vast sums of money which are not theirs; but they are manifested unto them for their possession and enjoyment of them. All the vast purchase of Christ's blood is, in the gospel, made over unto them as their property. They have not only a fund sufficient to pay their debt to justice and the law, but they are enriched for ever; for they are made heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

6. The glory of the mystery is manifested unto them. My brethren, the gospel is the ministration of righteousness: and the apostle says, that *If the ministration of condemnation be glory, how much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory*, 2 Cor. iii. 9. The law had a glory of terror attending it, being given with such an awful solemnity upon mount Sinai; but the gospel, from the beautiful mount Zion, has a glory that excels; a glory of peace, love and condescension. A God incarnate is glorious: a God upon a throne of grace is glorious: a pardon sealed with the blood of Christ is glorious: a divine righteousness is glorious; yea, there is such a glory in the crabb'd tree of the cross, that Paul cries aloud, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*, Gal. vi. 14. There is a real and transcendent glory in these things; but it is spiritual; therefore the carnal man cannot discern it; but the spiritual man sees the glory, and with Paul glories in it.

In the *third* place, we shall enquire how this mystery is made manifest to his saints.

1. It is manifested unto them externally by the word. Paul preached among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, Ephes. iii. 9. Whosoever hears the gospel, and are members of the visible church, have the mystery of grace externally revealed to them, whether they be saints or sinners. Hence, the church is called *The pillar and ground of truth*, 1 Tim. iii. 15.; not as if the authority of the gospel, for which it ought to be believed, depended upon the testimony of the church; but the allusion is to the practice of the Heathens, who used to write their laws in tables, and hang them on pillars of stone, either in their temples or market-places, that the people might read them. The Christian church is like one of those pillars, not making or authorising the gospel; but publishing and declaring it unto all. Now, I say, this manifestation of the mystery is common to the saints with the rest of the world; even as any act or edict affixed to the market-cross, may be read by all the subjects.

2. It is manifested unto them internally by the Spirit. Paul speaks fully to this purpose, 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him: but God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit.* The particle *But*, is in opposition to the revelation which is made of these things to the rest of the world: they are externally revealed to them by the word: they may read them in the scriptures; but they are revealed unto the saints by the Spirit: not that the Spirit gives them

them any revelation different from, or contrary to the word; but he takes the word itself and demonstrates it unto them, and gives them such views of it, as never entered into the heart of a natural man. Hence, when Christ is describing the work and office of the Holy Ghost, who was to come down after his ascension, he says to the disciples, *He shall bring all things to your remembrance, and he shall take of mine, and shew it unto you*, John xiv. 26, and xvi. 15. He shall not give you any new revelation; but he shall reveal that in you, which formerly was revealed unto you. Paul tells us, that at his conversion, *It pleased God to reveal his Son in him*. Gal. i. 16.

Carnal men have some knowlege of the mystery; but the saints know it quite after another manner.

i. They know it experimentally. Carnal men know it only by report or hearsay. They who believe, have felt that exceeding greatness of power which is in the gospel; and they have felt that joy unspeakable and full of glory which flows from believing it: they have such ideas and impressions of spiritual things made upon their hearts by the Holy Ghost, as never entered into the heart of a carnal man to conceive.

Suppose the picture of a man never so nicely drawn, yet they who have seen the man himself, will have another sort of idea of him, than those possibly can have, who have only seen his picture. A man who has read geography, may describe the complexion, religion, manners and customs, the commodities and curiosities of different countries, that he never saw; but the man who has been in those countries, and has seen all these things with his eyes, must have an
idea

idea and impresson of them, which the man who has only read or heard of them knows nothing about.

My brethren, the experimental knowlege of Christ and the gospel, which the meanest saints have, is preferable to all the learning of the world without it. It will make a man live to Christ, and die for Christ too, if he is providentially called to it. As one of the martyrs under popery told his adversaries, when they would dispute with him, that he had no great abilities to dispute for Christ, but he was very willing to burn for him.

2. They know it practically: carnal men only notionally. Saints know the mystery of the gospel, so as to regulate their lives by it: their conversation is in heaven, and as becomes the gospel of Christ. Remarkable to this purpose, is that speech of the apostle, Rom. vi. 17. *But ye have obeyed from the heart, that form of doctrine which was delivered you: Greek, into which ye were delivered.* The phrase expressees the wonderful efficacy of the gospel on the hearts of the saints; as if they were cast into it as into a mould, and came forth bearing the stamp and figure of it. But on the other hand, carnal men, though they may have their heads filled with notions of the gospel, yet their hearts are filled with lusts, and their lives with prophanity. The notions of truth kept in their heads, like the manna kept over night, putrify, and breed the filthy vermin of pride, hypocrisy and profaneness.

3. They know it so as to be comforted by it in all their afflictions. *This word of thine, says David, is my comfort in all my afflictions.* It is an interesting knowlege of the gospel, which the saints have; for they claim

claim all the blessings and benefits of it as their own. *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all things are theirs.* There is a certain pleasure in property and possession, and the more valuable the property is, the pleasure is the greater. The believer may say, my God the Father, my Saviour the Son, my Sanctifier the Holy Ghost. And what can he desire more?

But alas! carnal men have no saving interest in the unsearchable riches of the gospel: they cannot call them theirs; and so they have no comfort in them in the day of distress. Nebuchadnezzar says, my kingdom, my majesty; and that was all he had: for when he speaks to Daniel of God, he says not, my God, but your God.

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of what has been said upon this subject.

Is the gospel a mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to his saints? Then,

1st, Learn hence, what reason we have to be thankful for the New Testament dispensation, in which the mystery is manifested. How many generations of brave and gallant men have made their entrance into, and exit out of this world, when this mystery was not manifested in it! But our lot is fallen in the days of the gospel; the best dispensation that ever the world saw. Let us look to the ancient church of God; go as far back as the patriarchal age, even to Adam; they had visions, voices, revelations and dreams; but we have a more sure word of prophesy, unto which it becomes us well to take heed.

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Come downwards by Moses and the prophets, and there you will find the mystery overshadowed with an immense number of laborious rites and ceremonies, in-fomuch, that the apostle of the Jews calls them a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers could bear. But now all those things are done away; and we have the gospel in its native purity, plainness and simplicity. *Verily, I say unto you, many prophets and righteous men have desired to see and hear those things which ye do see and hear.* The queen of Sheba came to see the wisdom of Solomon; the Ninevites repented, at the preaching of Jonas: but behold a greater than either of them is manifested in the gospel! Even Jesus the Son of God; hear ye him.

3dly, Learn hence, with what holy reverence and godly fear, we should attend all the ordinances and institutions of the gospel. When the heathens celebrated their mysteries, there was one flood and cry-ed, *Procul, O procul este prophani*: their mysteries were mysteries of iniquity; but the gospel is a mystery of godliness: therefore *cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts ye double minded.* Do ye come to hear this mystery preached? Take the wise man's advice, Eccles. v. i. *Keep your hearts with all diligence, that it be not like the fool's eyes, in the ends of the earth.* Guard against wandering thoughts, wandering eyes, drowfiness, and every thing else that may mar edification. Do ye come to the sacrament? It is an holy ordinance: the table of the Lord is holy; and holy persons becomes holy things.

3dly, Learn hence, a reason why the gospel is so much opposed and despised in the world. It is a mystery, the world knows it not. The truths of it
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ly not level with carnal reason, which is the great idol of the age. Proud men come with their how's, and why's, and wherefore's; and when they are not satisfied, immediately they are offended. The duties of it ly not level with corrupt lusts and affections, but are for levelling and rooting them out altogether; and this they are not able to bear. The covetous man will not cease bowing to his idol; the drunkard will not refrain his cups; Herod will not part with Herodias. In fine, let men pretend what they will, the true reason why they find so many faults with this gospel, is, just because it finds so many faults with them.

4thly, See here the necessity of subjecting reason to faith, as the handmaid unto the mistress. We must subject our understandings to the mysteries of the gospel, as well as our wills and affections to the laws of the gospel. But must we divest ourselves of reason? No, ye are not called to lay it aside; but ye must keep it at God's footstool, humbly to adore and admire, what it cannot comprehend; and let it not up to the throne of God, to wrangle and dispute with him. If ye are obliged to believe a thousand things in nature, which ye cannot comprehend, it would be most unreasonable for you, to expect to be able to comprehend every thing in revealed religion.

5thly, See the necessity of the Spirit's illuminating your minds, that ye may understand the mystery. The gospel is among the deepest of the deep things of God. Now the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God, as Paul says, 1 Cor. ii. 10. He was promised of old to the disciples, to lead them into all truth. And you may assure yourselves, that with-

out his special gracious influences, you will never understand the gospel unto salvation. The world is come to that height of rage and malice against the Holy Ghost, as to ridicule his influences and operations upon the hearts of the saints. But let the world rage on, there is a great reality in these things which they ridicule. And they who now believe them, and value them more than their lives, will be pronounced wise, when their mockers will be publicly declared and denounced fools.

6thly, See here the necessity of faintship, if ye would know the mystery of the gospel; for it is only made manifest to his saints. Unto them it is given *to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables*, Mark iv. 11. Whatever be your profession, however much you may excel in knowlege, and other spiritual gifts, ye do not know one title of this gospel, as ye ought to know it, unless ye be saints.

My brethren, there are two dividing characters which divide all mankind, saints and sinners. They have divided them down through all ages unto this day, and they will divide them at the day of judgment. It is not Presbyterians and Independents, Seceders or Kirkmen; (these little petty distinctions, are like Jonah's gourd;) but it is saints or sinners. If ye are saints, then to you *Is the mystery, which was hid from ages and from generations, manifested*. If ye be sinners, ye know not a title of it as ye ought to know. Let every one in this assembly search and try, whether they are saints or sinners. Man, woman, whose art thou? Art thou one of God's saints, or one of the devil's sinners?

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XVIII.

The Mystery of CHRIST'S Incarnation, opened up.

I TIM. iii. 16.—*God was manifested in the Flesh.*

IN the first part of this verse, we have a brief description of the nature of the gospel. And in the latter part of it, we have a summary of the doctrines of the gospel.

I have already discoursed on the nature of the gospel, as a mystery, from Col. i. 26. And I now proceed to consider the summary of the doctrines of the gospel, from this text; and Jesus Christ is the subject of every one of them. The first is, *God was manifested in the flesh.* God is to be taken here, not essentially, but personally. It was not the person of the Father, nor the person of the Holy Ghost, but the person of the Son, who was incarnate. The attributes of God, had been formerly manifested in the creation and government of all things; but in the flesh or manhood of Christ, not only the things and attributes of God but God's own self is manifested: the very nature and person of God was manifested in the flesh.

By flesh, here, is meant human nature; the two constituent parts whereof are, a soul and a body. And the term *flesh*, likewise includes the weaknesses and infirmities of our nature. Though he took not

upon him the infirmities of this or that particular person, yet he took upon him the infirmities of human nature, which was a piece of great condescension.

The propriety of the second Person's being manifested in the flesh, rather than the first or third, the Father and the Holy Ghost, is obvious in several respects. It was meet the world should be restored by him who made the world: but the scripture tells us, that God made the world by the Son; and he made it by him, not as by an instrument, but as by a co-worker or colleague with him: therefore, meet and fit it was, that by the same hand he should restore and redeem the world, after it was laid in ruins.

It was meet, that he who was the Son of God by nature, *i. e.* by eternal and ineffable generation, should make us the sons of God. Who so fit to bring us into a state of friendship with God, as he who was the eternal Son of God?

In the order of subsistence in the same divine essence, the Son, we know, is the middle person; and therefore, it was fit that he should be the Mediator betwixt God and man, to reconcile them together.

In discoursing on this glorious mystery, *God made manifest in the flesh*, We shall, (1.) Consider the two natures; the divine and human. (2.) The union of these two natures in the person of the Son.

First, Then, let us consider the two natures so widely distant from one another; the divine and human natures.

The second person, who assumed our nature, did, from all eternity, and does, without interruption, un-
to

to eternity, partake of the same individual nature and essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, John i. 1. He is true God and eternal life, and God over all blessed for ever.* The 2d chapter of the Philippians, the 1st of the Colossians, and the 1st of the Hebrews, which you may read at your leisure, give such clear and ample testimony to the Godhead of the Son, that he who runs may read it.

Now, the necessity and fitness of our Redeemer, his being God, is obvious: for, (1.) How else could he have contained the whole counsel of God, with respect to our salvation, and declared it unto us? John i. 18. *None hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* The prophets of old got truths by piece-meal; now a truth and then a truth, as they were able to receive them; but the Son was a proper recipient subject of the whole counsel of God, being himself very and eternal God.

To this purpose he tells Nicodemus, *No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven, John iii. 13.* This ascending unto heaven, which he denies unto all men whatsoever, is an entrance into all the divine heavenly counsels of God: *q. d.* None hath, or ever had, a full comprehension of the divine counsels, but the Son of man who came down from heaven, in respect of his incarnation; and is even now in heaven, in the essence and glory of his divine nature. He came down from heaven, not locally, by a change of his residence, but by dispensation,

penfation, in the affumption of our nature unto perfonal union with himfelf.

2. It was neceffary he fhould be God, that he might bear the wrath of God for us. He was made fin, and a curfe for us : the whole flood of wrath, due to an elect world for their fins, was poured in upon his holy innocent foul ; and would have abfolutely overwhelmed it, had it not been underpropt and fupported by his divine nature : *His foul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death* : fore amazed, (the word fignifies, fuch horror and amazement, as makes ones hair to ftand on end) and in agony : all which manifefts how neceffary the divine nature was for the fupport of his humanity.

2. It was neceffary he fhould be God, that he might be conqueror over death and the grave. It was prophesied of him, that he would *fwallow up death in victory*, Ifa. xxv. 8. : and this was fulfilled in his refurrection from the dead, when he was declared to be the fon of God, as Paul faith, Rom. vii.

4. He was not made the Son of God by his refurrection, as the Socinians fay ; for that he was from eternity ; but upon his refurrection from the dead, he was declared and manifefted, beyond all contradiction, to be the Son of God : even as the fun coming out from under a cloud is manifefted to the world.

4. It was neceffary he fhould be God, that his fufferings might be of infinite value. The fufferings of a mere man, or of an angel affuming a body, could not have made atonement to God, the party offended ; for both men and angels are but finite creatures : but here, the dignity of the perfon fuffering, made
his

his sufferings infinite in value, though not in duration.

5. It was necessary he should be God, *that he might bring us to God*, 1 Pet. iii. 18. Sinners were to be brought into peace with God, and into communion with God; and how could either of these have been done but by the Son of God? What had they to offer unto God as an atonement and propitiation? If ye say they might have given their life; I answer, that is God's already; and so could be no compensation: but the Son of God had a life that was his own, and absolutely at his own disposal, which he offered through the eternal Spirit unto God, John x. 17, 8.

Again, who but he could have brought us into the presence of God, to have communion and fellowship with him? All the angels in heaven cannot sanctify a sinner: and it was impossible to bring them to communion with God un sanctified. But the Son of God is made unto us sanctification: he, and he alone, can sanctify the unholy sinner, and then lead him by the hand into God's presence, to have communion with him, Eph. ii. 18. The word signifies Adduction; he takes us by the hand, and brings us into his Father's presence.

So much concerning the divine nature. Let us next consider the human nature, which consists of two parts; a soul and a body.

1. *God made manifest in the flesh*, had a real reasonable soul, distinct from his divine nature; so that his divine nature was not instead of a soul unto him. Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature; one in respect of his body, the other in respect of his soul.

Wisdom

Wisdom belongs not to the flesh; nor can the knowledge of God, which is infinite, increase *. He then, who this knowledge did improve together with his years, must have a subject proper for it; which was no other than a human soul. This soul was the seat of the understanding, will and affections, distinct from the divine nature: it was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; and at his death on the cross, he commended it unto his Father. All which, shews the folly of those ancient heretics, who taught, that the *logos* assumed nothing of a man but the flesh. That he had a body, but not a soul, the divine nature serving instead of a soul; but if he assumed only a body, what spirit was this he commended unto his Father's hands? It could not be his divine nature; for then he would have ceased to be God: and where would have been the infinite value of his sacrifice? Of necessity, then, we must believe, that the Spirit he commended unto God, was a reasonable soul, which he had united unto, and animating his body, distinct from his divine nature. Besides, it is to be observed, that had he assumed only a body, he could not have been called man in the strict and proper sense of the word; for it is a soul and body united, that constitutes a man.

2. He had a real human body, and not a chimerical or imaginary one. *A body hast thou prepared me*, Heb. x. 5. It was not a body formed of condensed air, as some suppose these bodies were formed, in which angels appeared to the patriarchs of old: it was not formed of any substance sent down from

* Vid. Pearson on the Creed, Artic. 3.

heaven; nor was it formed immediately of the dust of the earth, as Adam's was; but it was formed of the substance of the woman; that so he might be bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; our kinsman-Redeemer. Some ancient heretics say, that the Son of God assumed an heavenly body, which passed through the Virgin as water through a pipe, without receiving any thing from her; and that he was born by Mary, but not of Mary. In opposition to this, our creed runs, *born of her yet without sin*. It is true, 'tis said, Rom. viii. 3. *That God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*; from whence some of old concluded, that it was not a real, but an aerial and phantastical body which he assumed. But the word Likeness, relates not to flesh, but to sin: it was flesh in reality, but sin in likeness and appearance only. If any say, What appearance or likeness of sin had he about him in the days of his flesh? I answer, his poverty, his sorrow, his reproach, the withdrawal of his Father's presence, and his submitting to death, had a likeness or appearance of sin; but he was, notwithstanding, holy, harmless, and undefiled.

3. He had all the sinless infirmities of human nature. This appears from the history of his life: he was hungry, thirsty, weary; he groaned, he wept, he bled, he died. He did not take upon him our personal infirmities, *i. e.* the infirmities peculiar to this and the other individual of the species, as fevers, gouts, or agues, &c. but he took upon him the infirmities of human nature. He took not our nature when it was in its original glory, honour and innocence; but after it was fallen from its excellen-

cy; tainted with the sin of Adam, and of thousands of generations that had sprung from him.

Now, the necessity and fitness of his being really and truly man, is obvious, if we consider the complex nature of his office: he was to be our prophet, priest, and king; each of which required his partaking of our nature.

1. He was to be our prophet; and had he not likewise partaked of our nature, we would neither had eyes to see him, nor ears to hear him. Had he been God only, and not man, no mortal eyes could have endured to see him. For, as the apostle says, *God dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see*, 1 Tim. vi. 16. Ever since the fall he is hidden from man: and, which is strange, he is hidden with light, an ordinary mean of manifestation. When we look into a clear glass, it casteth no shadow to us; but put steel upon the back, then it casteth a reflex. So, look upon the Word in his own immediate brightness and essence, and we cannot see him; but if we put the flesh or manhood, as it were, a-back to his Godhead, then he will cast a comfortable reflex to us. There is no beholding him by our weak eyes, unless the glorious and piercing beams of his eternal divine essence be, as it were, refracted, broken and abated, in a cloud of flesh.

Again, were he God only, and not man, no mortal ears could endure to hear him. The voice of God is terrible, and makes all nature tremble. *Speak thou unto us*, said the people of Israel unto Moses, *and we will hear; but let not God speak any more to us lest we die*, Exod. xix. 18. But what should

should come of the people of Israel, and succeeding generations, when Moses was dead and gone? Who would speak to them then? Why, *a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto me, him shall ye hear.*

2. He was to be the great high priest of the church; and therefore, it was highly necessary he should be man. The two eminent parts of that office, are oblation and intercession; and to the right discharge of both, the human nature was absolutely necessary.

1. He was to offer up a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and to reconcile us unto God. But the God-head could not be offered up in sacrifice; it could not be crucified, nor die. Besides, the law required, that the same nature that had sinned should suffer: man had sinned; therefore, the man Christ Jesus did, through the eternal Spirit, offer up his human nature without spot unto God. The law said, *In the day thou eatest thou shalt surely die*: but God could not die: therefore, God became man; God was made manifest in the flesh, that he might undergo the law's threatening of death.

In a war between the Lacedemonians and the Athenians, the oracle foretold, that the army whose general should be slain by the enemy, should be conqueror: hereupon, Codrus king of the Athenians, willing to sacrifice his life for the good of his country, laid aside his royal robes, with which if he had been clad, none of the Lacedemonians would have touched him, put on the habit of a peasant, and in that disguise, went into the enemy's camp, where he was

quickly slain; and so purchased victory for his country.

To apply this to our purpose: Satan had waged war with human nature, and there would have been no victory on our side without the death of the Captain of our salvation. As God, ye know, he could not die: it was impossible: therefore he divested himself of his robes of majesty and glory, and clothed himself with the rags of our humanity: he became man, and as such, was sacrificed for us.

2. He was to make intercession for us; and therefore, it was meet he should be man. How should we have free and easy access unto him with our requests, that he may present them to his Father, unless he partaked of our nature? If the Israelites could not look upon Moses his face, till he put a vail upon it, how impossible would it be to look upon that uncreated beauty and excellency, which communicated the shine to the face of Moses? But when this beauty and brightness are veiled with our nature; when our advocate and intercessor is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, this gives us boldness and courage, so that we can come unto him, and pour out our hearts before him.

Moreover, we need an high priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way. Therefore, the Son of God took our nature upon him, with all its sinless frailties and infirmities; and as he learned obedience, so he learned sympathy, by the things which he suffered; and is as merciful as well as faithful high priest. Consider him absolutely as God, he is merciful; for
mercy

mercy is an essential attribute of the deity. But consider him as incarnate, and he is merciful in such a way, as God himself alone had never been. He does now, in as kindly, and in as natural a way, pity us, who are flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone, as a man pities a man.

3. He was to be our king; and it was fit the head and the members should partake of the same nature; that he should rule over us, who *was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh*, and not a stranger. The people of Israel, to persuade David to be captain over them, tells him, *Behold we are thy bone and thy flesh*, 2 Sam. v. 1. And Abimelech uses the same argument with the men of Shechem, to persuade them to accept of him for their king, *Remember also, that I am your bone and your flesh*, Judges ix. 2.

We proceed now to consider the union of the two natures, in the one person of the Son of God. In order to this, there were,

1. The conception of the body in the womb of the virgin mother, by the Holy Ghost. According to the words of the angel unto Mary, Luke i. 35. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.* The Holy Ghost did, as the word imports, as it were, cast a cloud over her, to teach us that we should not over curiously pry into so great a work as this was: it was a miraculous conception, and therefore a work of power, as well as of grace and wisdom. Nor is there any absurdity or contradiction in the thing, upon the supposition of infinite power exerted to effect it: for what is impossible unto him, who, by a word of power, commanded all nature into being.

Neither

Neither does this formation of the body of Christ make the Holy Ghost the Father of Christ. For the child is formed of the substance of the father; whereas, the body of Christ was formed, not of the substance of the Holy Ghost, but of the substance of the woman, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

2. The sanctification of it by the same Holy Spirit, that it might be a fit habitation for the fulness of the Godhead. Luke i. 35. *Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.* That part of the woman's substance which went to the formation of the body of Christ, was, by the Holy Ghost, purified and cleansed from the least stain or taint of sin; so that here was a clean thing brought out of an unclean thing; a sinless man born of a sinful woman.

3. The assumption of the human nature, soul and body, formed by the Holy Ghost into union with the second person, which was an act of the Son of God himself. Heb. ii. 14. *He himself likewise took part of the same;* verse 16. *For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.* The Son's act of assumption is exprest both negative and positive. For the clearer understanding of it, the words rightly rendered, would run thus; *He doth not take hold of angels, but the seed of Abraham he taketh hold of.* The word rendered taking hold of, signifies to catch any one, who is either running away, or falling on the ground, or into a pit, to fetch back and recover again. It is the same word that is used with respect to Peter, when, being ready to sink, Christ caught him and saved him, Mat. xiv. 13. Moreover, the Greek word answers

to the Hebrew word, used in the Old Testament, with respect to Lot, when the angel caught him, and by a strong hand plucked him out of Sodom. One delivered from the water, the other from the fire. So the word imports, that human nature was running headlong to eternal ruin; but the Son of God caught hold of it and prevented its ruin, by assuming a portion of it into union with his divine person.

Further, let it be observed, That the Son of God did not assume a human person, but a human nature. Therefore, in Scripture, what Christ assumed, is represented as a thing, not as a person. The angel says, *That holy thing*, &c. and Heb. x. 5. *A body hast thou prepared me*. The resultance of a personality from the human nature was prevented, by its being immediately, upon its formation, united unto the second person. It never had one moment's subsistence by itself; but as they say of the soul, it is created upon its infusion, and infused upon its creation: so the human nature of Christ was assumed into union with his person, upon its creation, and created upon its assumption.

Some illustrate this by the plant called *mistletoe*, which having no root of its own, both grows and lives in the body of the oak, or some other tree. So the human nature, having no subsistence of its own, is as it were ingrafted into the person of the Son, and is wholly supported by it, so as it should not be at all, if it were not sustained in that manner.

Thirdly, We shall enquire into the result of this union, or the effects and consequences of it. There are,

1. The distinction of the natures. We must not believe

believe a conversion of the human nature into the divine, as the Eutychians of old fancied. This was the proper opinion of Eutyches, as appears from his confession in the council of Chalcedon, where his doctrine was condemned. Two distinct natures he confessed at first, but when the union was once made, he acknowledged but one. But when that union was made, he did not say, nor could his followers agree. Howsoever, when they were united, his opinion clearly was, that the human nature was so absorbed into the divine, so wholly made the same, that it ceased wholly to be what it was; and so there was but one, *i. e.* the divine nature remained. In opposition unto this, we believe from the scriptures, that tho' the divine and human natures are united in the person of the Son, yet they remain distinct; and each nature retains its own distinct essential properties, so that the human nature is not reckoned infinite, omniscient, or omnipotent by its union with the divine; nor is the divine nature become finite by means of its union with the human. The Word was made flesh, not by any change of its own nature or essence, not by a transubstantiation of the divine nature into the human, or of the human nature into the divine, not by ceasing to be what he was, but by becoming what he was not, in taking our nature to his own, to be his own for ever.

2. The unity of the person. The human nature having no subsistency of itself, subsists in the person of the Son, and never had one moment's subsistence separate therefrom. Hence our catechism says, agreeable to the scripture account of the matter, that Christ continueth

continueth to be both God and man in two distinct natures, and one person for ever.

Now as Eutyches, of whom we heard already, confounded the two natures; so Nestorius divided the person, and made two persons; one God, the other man. This doctrine was also condemned in the fore-said council; and the fathers there assembled, express the manner of the union of the two natures of Christ in these particulars, (1.) They say, it is without mutation; one nature is not changed into another. (2.) Without separation. They shall not be separated one from another unto eternity: so that even at the death of Christ, though the soul and body were separated from the other, yet neither of them were separated from the person. (3.) Without division. There are not two several persons, but only one. (4.) Without mixture. Neither the natures nor the natural properties are mixed, but each nature retains its peculiar properties, will and operations. For if mixture hath place, then he is neither true God nor true man, but a compound of both.

3. The communication of properties, whereby that is attributed to whole Christ, which agreeth to him but in respect of one of his natures. As when we say Christ was crucified dead and buried; we mean it of the manhood only, and not of the Godhead. When Christ says of himself, *Before Abraham was, I am*; it must be meant of his Godhead only, and not of his manhood, which came of the seed of Abraham.

Sometimes that is spoken of one nature, which agrees to his whole person, 1 Tim. ii. 5. *There is one Mediator betwixt God and man, the man Christ Jesus*. Now the person of Christ God-man is our Media-

tor; for mediation is a personal act, and there is no person in our Mediator but one.

Sometimes that is attributed to one nature, which is attributed to the other, Acts xx. 28. *The church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.* This is peculiar to the human nature; but because of the unity of the person, it is called the blood of God.

4. The exaltation of the human nature, in the person of the Son of God, above all created beings whatsoever. To this the apostle bears testimony, Phil. ii. 9. *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him;* Greek, exalted him above all exaltation. Angels are highly exalted, saints are highly exalted; but the human nature of Christ is exalted with a glory of another kind, than that which either angels or men are partakers of: for the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth therein. Never did God come so near the creature as here. He was in the world by his universal presence; he was in the tabernacle and temple by types and symbols; in the saints he is by his grace; in heaven, he is in immediate glory; but in the incarnation, he is hypostatically in an human nature. My brethren, this union of our nature to the person of the Son, stands single and unexampled; there is nothing like it either in heaven or in earth: let us believe, admire, and adore what we cannot comprehend.

How highly is the human nature exalted, when the person in whom it is united with the divine, is the object of religious worship and adoration to angels and to men? *For God hath given him a name above every name,*

name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and before him every tongue should confess. This may serve to clear that question sometime disputed among divines, Whether Christ is to be worshipped as Mediator? It is not the divine nature of Christ that is our Mediator, nor yet the human nature; but the divine person in whom these two natures are united, is the only Mediator betwixt God and man; and no doubt he is the object of all religious worship and adoration. His divine nature is the ground, cause, and warrant of religious worship: the divine person is the proper and formal object of this worship; and his human nature is a motive and encouragement thereunto. But the human nature of Christ absolutely considered, being a created thing, and subject to the deity, cannot be the object of worship or adoration; for God will not give his glory unto any created being. And those who ascribe ubiquity, omniscience and adoration to the human nature of Christ, do destroy it, by an attempt to deify it.

5. The doing and suffering of the person in whom the two natures are united, are of infinite value. Heb. ix. 14. *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God.* The guilty law-condemned sinner, is now furnished with a proper answer to the demands of incensed justice and a broken law: for the man who suffered and died in the room and stead of sinners, is the man God's fellow and equal every way. It is the obedience of God, and the blood of God; both which are of infinite value.

Oh, my brethren, how does infinite wisdom, in-

finite grace and goodness, concur and display themselves in the admirable constitution of the person of Christ God-man! had he been God only, and not man, we who are guilty creatures could never have approached unto him; for he would have been a terror unto us. Had he been man only, and not God, he could never have brought us unto God, nor offered unto God a ransom for us: but being God and man in one person, all the ends of the divine glory are fully obtained, and all the necessities of sinners are fully answered and provided for. In the person of Christ, *Mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace one another.*

Lastly, The eternal subsistence of the human nature in the person of the Son. He was from eternity God-man contracted; but the marriage with our nature was not consummate, until *the fulness of time was come, that God sent forth his Son made of a woman.* Howbeit, he took not our nature, to appear in it only when he conversed among men; nor yet only to make an appearance with it in heaven, and then to lay it aside: no; he took it into eternal union with his person, and will be both God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person forever.

I proceed now to make a short improvement of this subject.

I. Was God made manifest in the flesh? Then, (1.) Behold the love of God to mankind sinners! behold what manner of love is this! love without precedent or parallel: it stands single and unexampled. When Jesus wept over his friend Lazarus his grave,

grave, the Jews cry out, Behold how he loved him. When we behold God made man, God manifested in flesh for mankind-sinners, we may make the same reflection, and cry out, Behold how he loved them.

2. Was the Son of God manifested in the flesh? Then let us behold with wonder, the depth of his humiliation and abasement! *He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God; yet he emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*

1. He was conceived in the womb. O amazing! that he, before whom all nations are as the drop of a bucket, as the small dust of the balance, should be an embryo, a small piece of unfashioned flesh: that he who fills heaven and earth, and whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, should himself be shut up and contained, and carried for nine months in the womb of the Virgin.

2. He was born. He who was begotten of his Father before all time, was, in the fulness of time, born of a woman. How amazing is it, that the Ancient of Days should be an infant of days; that the eternal Word of the Father should not be able to utter a word or syllable; that eternity should be born, and immortality become mortal; that the terrible Thunderer in the heavens should be a child crying in a manger; that he who grasps the heavens in his fist, should be an infant of a span long:----- These things are amazing and confounding, and what we could never have believed, had they not been revealed unto us by the gospel.

You

You think a precious stone much debased, if it be set in a base metal. You think yourselves dishonoured to be in any matter joined with such as are below you. Oh, what an abasement was it for the person of the Son of God to be joined with our nature, which bears not unto it half the proportion which the basest metal has to the most precious jewel. Oh, consider what it was to have joined in one person, Majesty and meanness, Omnipotence and weakness, Creator and creature, God and man.

F I N I S.

